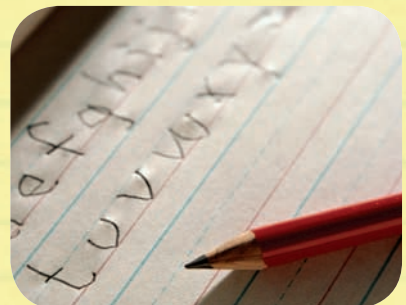




PEARSON NEW  
INTERNATIONAL EDITION

Lives Across Cultures  
Cross-Cultural Human Development  
Harry W. Gardiner Corinne Kosmitzki  
Fifth Edition



# Pearson New International Edition

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Cross-Cultural Human Development  
Harry W. Gardiner Corinne Kosmitzki  
Fifth Edition

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# INTRODUCTION

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Many books begin by introducing their readers to the history of the field. This is certainly essential (though sometimes boring), but will come later in this text (you can always skip it if you don't find it very interesting, but we would highly recommend you look at it). As one of the authors, I (Gardiner) would like to begin this text as I begin most of my classes—by relating a few of my own cross-cultural experiences.

My wife, Ormsin, is from Thailand and we have raised our four children in an Asian American family, where my wife is the Asian, I am the American, and our children are the Asian Americans and I am the minority—the one with the blond hair and blue eyes. I don't like to admit it, but I'm also the shortest, making me a double minority! As you might imagine, raising children in a cross-cultural and bilingual home has resulted in many interesting developmental experiences, some of which may help you better understand the processes involved in cross-cultural human development.

One experience concerns our eldest daughter, Alisa, and the way in which she became bilingual. Our cross-cultural family setting provided a unique opportunity for this to take place. We had been advised that the best approach to helping her become bilingual was to let her hear and speak both languages without emphasizing that they *were* two languages. So, when she was an infant and young child, her mother spent much of the day speaking to her in Thai, while I spoke to her in English. Then, one evening, when she was about three years old, one of my Chinese students came to baby-sit. Alisa opened the door, saw an Asian face, and began speaking Thai. The young lady patiently listened to her and then said, "I'm Chinese and I understand English, but I'll bet you were speaking to me in Thai, weren't you?" I watched as she thought about this and then turned to me and said, "I speak two languages, don't I? Daddy, I speak two languages!" I told her that indeed she did and asked, "What did you think was happening all this time?" Her reply, based on the experience of her unique developmental niche in a bilingual home, was,

From Chapter 1 of *Lives Across Cultures: Cross-Cultural Human Development*, Fifth Edition. Harry W. Gardiner, Corinne Kosmitzki. Copyright © 2011 by Pearson Education, Inc. All rights reserved.

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"I thought it was all one big language and Mommy understood some words and you understood others and I understood them all!"

In this chapter, we make reference to how important it is to understand another culture and realize that not everyone has the same understanding of topics and events. Sometimes, when traveling, studying, or working in another culture, our experiences are frustrating, scary, or humorous. I had an opportunity to live in England for three years while completing my doctoral studies at the University of Manchester. During that time, there was one food craving I found nearly impossible to fulfill—*popcorn*! My roommate and I searched everywhere for it. The only place anything resembling it was available was at the cinema. The only problem: It was sticky, caramel-covered "goop," not the white, fluffy kernels sprinkled with salt and hot butter with which we were familiar. Eventually, using the skills of Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson, we discovered small (tiny, actually) thirty-kernel bags of popping corn at the airport and bought the entire stock! A few days later, we visited a British family that had befriended these two "Yanks from across the pond" and took some with us. When we asked the husband whether we could make some popcorn, he replied (much to our surprise), "No, that's impossible." When we asked why, he said, "Popcorn grows on bushes. You pick it and put caramel on it." We told him he might be confusing this with cotton, which grows on bushes but is not eaten. Nevertheless, he supplied us with a pot, and we put in some oil and threw in some kernels. When it began to make noise, we tried to explain that this was the corn popping. When it was done, we showed him. He took one look and disappeared out the back door! A few minutes later, he returned with his neighbors, looked at us, and said, "Do it again!" One day, I think I'll open a popcorn stand at a street corner in London and surprise and amaze the British public with the wonders of popcorn! Now, if I could only get it to grow on bushes! The moral of this story: We all grow up in cultures where we understand what happens around us because the experiences are a familiar part of our environment and our daily lives. These experiences are not always easily understood by those living in different ecological settings.

More than two decades ago, the anthropologist Theodore Schwartz, writing about the acquisition of culture, declared that "anthropologists had ignored children in culture while developmental psychologists had ignored culture in children" (1981, p. 4). Just two years later, John Berry, a Canadian psychologist and pioneering researcher in cross-cultural psychology, noted that the discipline was "so culture-bound and culture-blind . . . [that] . . . it should not be employed as it is" (1983, p. 449). Shortly thereafter, Gustav Jahoda, a well-known European psychologist and early contributor to the developing discipline, was able to express a more optimistic view and point out that cross-cultural studies of human development had been steadily increasing (1986). Yet, at the same time, he also criticized the field for being "too parochial in its orientation" (p. 418).



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*Harry Gardiner and his British friends making popcorn 30 years later.  
(Courtesy of authors)*

These were once serious criticisms of the newly emerging field. Fortunately, in recent years, great strides have been made in our approaches to, and understanding of, cross-cultural human development.

In this chapter, we introduce some historical perspectives and expanding on some of the major concepts, themes, and issues. Let us begin by exploring the origins of cross-cultural human development.

### ◆ WHAT IS CROSS-CULTURAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT?

The field of cross-cultural psychology is remarkably diverse, and those who contribute to it bring with them a variety of viewpoints, including different definitions of the field itself. In Volume 1 of the revised *Handbook of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, Berry, Poortinga, and Pandey (1997) define **cross-cultural psychology** as “the systematic study of relationships between the cultural context of human development and the behaviors that become established in the repertoire of individuals growing up in a particular culture” (p. x). This definition clearly states that this is a *scientific* endeavor that shares with more familiar disciplines the use of theories, scientific methodologies, statistical procedures, and data analysis.



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The term human development has also been defined in a variety of ways. For the purpose of this text, we view **human development** as *changes in physical, psychological, and social behavior as experienced by individuals across the lifespan from conception to death*. While this definition encompasses a wide range of experiences, the intention of this text is not to provide exhaustive and comprehensive coverage of all aspects of human development (Aren't you glad to hear that?). Instead, our goal is more limited, focusing on a number of selected topics that provide insight and understanding into how individuals develop and live their lives in different cultural settings. In doing this, we provide examples from literally scores of societies throughout the world. Considering the important dimensions just discussed, and not finding the term **cross-cultural human development** defined elsewhere, we have chosen to view it as *cultural similarities and differences in developmental processes and their outcomes as expressed by behavior in individuals and groups*.

Since we just mentioned the term culture, it should be pointed out that most researchers agree that this is one of the most difficult terms in the social sciences to define. Almost everyone who studies culture has a different way of looking at it, reflecting in part, different theories for understanding the concept as well as for describing various forms of human behavior. E. B. Tylor was the first anthropologist to use the term in his two-volume work titled *Primitive Culture* (1871). He defined culture as “*that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society*” (p. 1). More than fifty years ago, two other anthropologists, Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) compiled a list of 164 definitions of the term.

In 2002, UNESCO, an agency of the United Nations, stated that culture is the “*set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs*” (UNESCO, 2002, p. 1).

Azuma (2005) has even proposed a new conceptualization of culture “beyond nationality, geography, class, and even ethnicity,” which he tentatively calls “functional culture” (p. xii). It is his contention that “traditional culture” of past generations, uncontaminated, and with distinct and static systems “envisioned by cultural anthropologists in the early 1900s no longer exists” (p. xii). Rather, in the contemporary world, individuals come into contact with a variety of cultures as a result of the media, travel, reading, migration, and other activities, including, we might add, such currently popular Internet social networks as Facebook, MySpace, and YouTube. As a result, “cultures interact with and influence each other”; and traditions, which are part of functional culture, are “more fluid or fragmented” than they once were. In fact, cultures today import many of their features from other cultures and societies—features, which Azuma points out, “were quite foreign to people even a half century ago, and change and substitution of elements are constant” (p. xii). However, he goes on to emphasize that global

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culture does not become homogeneous, because the way in which these features are distributed within cultures will differ as a result of “traditional emphasis, condition of industry and labor, natural resources, climate, or just by chance” (p. xii); and this will determine cultural specificity. He stresses that “such culture forms a developmental niche not as a loose collection of fragments but as a configuration that is structured yet inevitably fluid . . . [and] . . . Human development must be studied as embedded in a dynamically functioning group culture . . . [in which] . . . More lively understanding results from carefully analyzing how specific behaviors interact with cultural conditions that are always bound by time and place” (p. xii). As you will see, later in this chapter, Azuma’s contemporary view of culture fits very well with our definition and theoretical approach to understanding cross-cultural human development.

In the absence of an as yet commonly agreed-upon definition of **culture**, when we use the term in this text we will be referring to *the cluster of learned and shared beliefs, values (achievement, individualism, collectivism, etc.), practices (rituals and ceremonies), behaviors (roles, customs, traditions, etc.), symbols (institutions, language, ideas, objects, and artifacts, etc.), and attitudes (moral, political, religious, etc.) that are characteristic of a particular group of people and that are communicated from one generation to another.*

A caveat regarding this definition may be in order before we proceed. Since there is no consensus regarding “the” definition of culture (and it is unlikely there ever will be), our definition is a compilation of several previously published definitions combined with some thoughts of our own as to what constitutes this concept. As Shwalb has accurately pointed out, in most comparative studies, culture is “unfortunately equated with nationality, which is convenient for readers to understand . . . but not satisfying. . . .” (personal communication, 2005). He goes on to say that he would like to see culture “better distinguished conceptually from nationality, ethnicity, race, and religion” (personal communication, 2005). We, and many other social scientists, would surely agree, but, as the reader might imagine, this effort, like defining culture, is a most difficult task and better left for another time.

As the field of cross-cultural psychology has evolved, concerns in the area of development have undergone a number of significant shifts. Parke, Ornstein, Rieser, and Zahn-Waxler (1994) succinctly summarized and discussed the changes in developmental focus over the past hundred years by looking at three periods. One hundred years ago, five major areas were of interest: emotional development, the biological basis of behavior, cognitive development, conscious and unconscious processes, and the role of self in development. During the 1950s and 1960s, the focus shifted to learning theory, the rise of experimental child psychology, interest in operant analysis of children’s behavior, investigations of infant sensory and perceptual development, and the objective measurement of cognitive understanding among preverbal infants. Today, there is a revitalized interest in emotional development

and cognitive abilities of children, the biological bases of behavior, and social relationships. According to the authors, the “most unanticipated theme is the continuing discovery of the precocity of infants and young children—not only cognitively but also socially and emotionally” (p. 8). More recently, Lickliter and Honeycutt (2003) have shown that advances in genetics, embryology, and developmental biology are transforming contemporary developmental and evolutionary theories that challenge once popular gene-centered explanations of human behavior.

## ◆ CROSS-CULTURAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND THE OTHER SOCIAL SCIENCES

In commenting on the central role that culture plays in our efforts to better understand behavior, Segall, Lonner, and Berry posed an interesting and critical question: “Can it still be necessary, as we approach the millennium (as measured on the Western, Christian calendar), to advocate that all social scientists, psychologists especially, take culture seriously into account when attempting to understand human behavior?” (1998, p. 1101). At that time, the answer was (a qualified)—yes! Fortunately, as we enter the second decade of the twenty-first century, the situation has dramatically improved and only continues to get better.

When discussing cross-cultural psychology and its subdiscipline of cross-cultural human development, it is obvious they share a long historical connection with general psychology. Although, as the well-known psychologist-anthropologist Otto Klineberg has pointed out, “There is no specific date that can be identified with the onset of interest in cross-cultural comparisons” (1980, p. 34). Jahoda and Krewer have suggested that it might be as early as the seventeenth century since the “dominant perspective of enlightenment philosophy was highly compatible with cross-cultural psychology’s model of man” (1997, p. 11). Since the 1960s, much of our psychological research—particularly that, which has emphasized the cross-cultural approach—has focused on the areas of abnormal, cognitive, social, and developmental psychology (Jahoda, 2009).

In terms of the other social sciences, the closest links are to anthropology and sociology with shared interests in specific approaches, methodological procedures, and research interests, including the socialization process and family influences on development. At the same time, this relationship has not always been a smooth one. Some of the difficulties, especially those centering on comparative studies of infant development, were pointed out by Super nearly thirty years ago when he stated that, for several decades, psychology and anthropology “seem to have withdrawn from the interface . . . to tend to their own theories. Very few studies . . . achieve, or even attempt,

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an integration of infant care and development, on the one hand, with functional and value characteristics of the larger culture, on the other" (1981, pp. 246–247). At the same time, he noted that success in these areas would require researchers to improve their ethnographic knowledge of cultures as well as to develop quantitative baselines of information for use in future studies. As you will discover in reading this text, this is precisely the path that much of present-day, cross-cultural human development research has taken (Gardiner, 2001b).

In a lively and entertaining book titled *Psychology and Anthropology: A Psychological Perspective*, Gustav Jahoda, a psychologist with a true appreciation and understanding of both psychology and anthropology, noted, "Anthropologists have always been concerned with psychology, even if unwittingly. . . . However, this interest has, in many respects, remained narrowly culture-bound, largely ignoring the wider perspectives provided by anthropology" (1982, back cover).

It is our sincere hope that in the future cross-cultural psychologists, in particular those interested in human development, will be able to forge a bond with other social scientists, notably anthropologists, and work together as partners in laying a firm foundation for an empirically based understanding of human behavior that places a greater focus on developmental processes within cultural contexts. A welcome step in this direction has been made with several volumes that focus on emerging concepts and methods for measuring environment (or context) across the lifespan (Friedman & Wachs, 1999; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2004) and childhood and family life (Weisner, 2002). Another important contribution is the book, *Developmental Psychology and Social Change*, by Pillemer and White (2005) discussing the historical evolution of developmental psychology, its goals, and its current challenges. The chapter by Charles Super on the globalization of developmental psychology is of particular interest. Efforts such as these and others will greatly enrich our understanding of development and the vital role that culture plays in it.

### ◆ SOME IMPORTANT THEMES

This text differs in significant ways from most other volumes that focus on cross-cultural aspects of human behavior, most notably in its efforts to integrate a variety of important themes. Let us look at these in some detail.

#### **A Cross-Cultural Perspective**

Over the past two decades, social scientists have become increasingly aware of the contributions that cross-cultural research findings can make to our

understanding of human development. Any attempt to include all or even most of these findings in a book of this length would be impossible. Therefore, we have decided to be selective and discuss representative areas of interest using a chronological-within-topics approach. For readers desiring a more comprehensive view of cross-cultural human development, or for those wishing to explore particular topics in greater depth, we refer you to the Further Readings section at the close of this chapter. If you are eager to get started, you might consider looking at such classics as *Two Worlds of Childhood: U.S. and U.S.S.R.* by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1970) and a series of volumes on *Six Cultures* by Whiting (1963), Whiting and Whiting (1975), and Whiting and Edwards (1988). Edwards, Weisner, and others discuss the importance of these studies and the contributions of John and Beatrice Whiting in a special 2010 edition of the *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*. There is the revised three-volume *Handbook of Cross-Cultural Psychology* (1997), edited by John Berry and others, which contains several chapters relevant to the study of cross-cultural development as well as the role of cross-cultural theory and methodology. In addition, there is the *Encyclopedia of Psychology*, eight volumes providing a definitive guide to the major areas of psychological theory, research, and practice (Kazdin, 2000). Finally, there is the *Handbook of Culture and Psychology* presenting the state of the art of major areas and issues in cross-cultural psychology, including development (Matsumoto, 2001).

### Goals for the Field

As to the nature and purpose of the cross-cultural method, Berry, Poortinga, Segall, and Dasen (2002), in a comprehensive overview of cross-cultural psychology, set forth three goals for the field. The first goal involves *testing or extending the generalizability of existing theories and findings*. In earlier writings, Berry and Dasen (1974) referred to this as the “transport and test goal” in which hypotheses and findings from one culture are transported to another so that their validity can be tested in other cultural settings. For example, are parental speech patterns in English-speaking families similar or dissimilar to those in Spanish-speaking families? Are the stages of cognitive development proposed by Jean Piaget specific to certain types of cultures, or are they universal?

The second goal focuses on *exploring other cultures in order to discover variations in behavior that may not be part of one’s own cultural experience*. In other words, if findings cannot be generalized, what are the reasons for this, and are these behaviors unique to these other cultures? A good example is a study, by Jablensky and colleagues (1992), that successfully demonstrates that a number of symptoms characteristic of schizophrenia (a serious psychological disorder) exist in ten very different cultures, but that there is no single factor to explain differences in the formation or outcome of the disorder. At

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the same time, other psychological conditions appear to be “culture-bound” and occur only among certain groups of people. One example is *pibloktoq*, found only among specific groups of Eskimos, in which individuals, with little or no warning, perform irrational acts lasting a few minutes or as long as an hour, for example, ripping off clothes, shouting obscenities, throwing objects, and running wildly into snowdrifts (Kirmayer & Minas, 2000).

The third goal, which follows from the first two, is aimed at *integrating findings in such a way as to generate a more universal psychology applicable to a wider range of cultural settings and societies*. Examples of this include efforts by many cross-cultural researchers to refine and expand the usefulness of several theories.

We would add to this list a fourth goal—*applying research findings across professional disciplines*. For example, preparing students to study, work, and travel abroad; improving minority children’s academic and social success in school; assisting counselors, psychotherapists, social workers, and other professionals in better understanding and helping immigrants with the psychological and social adaptation to a new culture; helping managers and employees in public, private, and government organizations meet the challenges of cultural diversity in the workplace at home and abroad and contributing to greater success in business practices and negotiations; and drawing attention to the basic human rights of children, families, women, and others in cultures across the globe.

At this point, you might be wondering, “How can a cross-cultural perspective contribute to our understanding of human development?” In answer to this question, Gardiner (2001b) has pointed to a number of important benefits. First, looking at behavior from this perspective compels researchers to reflect seriously on the ways in which their cultural beliefs and values affect the development of their theories and research designs. Increased awareness of cross-cultural findings provides an opportunity to extend or restrict the implications of research conducted in a single cultural group, most notably the United States and similar Western societies. Nothing helps to reduce ethnocentrism as quickly as looking at behavior as it occurs in other cultures. **Ethnocentrism** is defined as *the tendency to judge other people and cultures by the standards of one’s own culture and to believe that the behavior, customs, norms, values, and other characteristics of one’s own group are natural, valid, and correct while those of others are unnatural, invalid, and incorrect*. If you have traveled to another culture, it is likely you have experienced ethnocentrism first hand. Can you think of some examples? What were your reactions to these differences?

Second, the number of independent and dependent variables to be investigated can be greatly increased in a cross-cultural design. Examples of studies in which this has been done include investigations of gender differences (Morinaga, Frieze, & Ferligoj, 1993), effects of parent–child relationships in diverse cultures (Gielen & Roopnarine, 2004), and individualism–collectivism

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and the attitudes toward school bullying of Japanese and Australian students (Nesdale & Naito, 2005). We generally think of an **independent variable (IV)** as *the condition introduced into or systematically manipulated in an experiment by the researcher*, and a **dependent variable (DV)** as *the subject's response or the behavior being measured in an experiment*. For example, you believe that watching violence in television cartoons makes young children more aggressive (your hypothesis). You show one group of children (matched for age, gender, socioeconomic background, etc.) violent cartoons and a similar group cartoons with no violence. You then measure the level of aggression shown by these children when in play situations. Your IV is the amount of cartoon violence to which children are exposed, and your DV is a child's resulting level of aggression when playing with others. Try to think of a hypothesis of your own and identify the IV and the DV.

Third, cross-cultural studies help us to separate **emics**, or *culture-specific concepts*, from **etics**, or *universal or culture-general concepts*. McDonald's is a good example of an emic approach to cultural consumer behavior. The fast food restaurant successfully sells market-specific items in very different cultures such as a Maharaja Mac (chicken burger) in India, McPalta (burger with avocado sauce) in Chile, and McBingsoo (shaved ice) in Korea. The etic approach is well illustrated by the coffee chain Starbucks, which provides a similar store structure in widely different cultures—strong coffee, soft lighting, and comfortable couches and beanbag seating. Can you think of some other examples?

The **emic** (insider) **approach** focuses on a single culture, using criteria that are thought to be relative to it, and studies behavior from *within* the system itself, making no cross-cultural inferences with regard to the universality of any observations. An example is an anthropological field study in which a researcher lives with a group of people and tries to understand the culture through their eyes and experiences, avoiding the ethnocentrism of his or her own cultural background. The **etic** (outsider) **approach**, on the other hand, looks at several cultures, comparing and contrasting them using criteria thought to be absolute or universal, and studies behavior from *outside* the system. An example, which (happily) we don't see as often as we once did in cross-cultural psychology, involves an investigator conducting what has been called "safari research." An illustration is a professor (not very familiar with the field) who goes on vacation to several countries, taking along a favorite questionnaire concerning \_\_\_\_\_ (you fill in the blank). He or she visits several universities, collects data from available students (who may or may not understand many of the colloquial English language terms), returns home, and publishes the findings as "universal" attitudes of those living in cultures X, Y, and Z.

Separating emics from etics is better accomplished by testing theories or principles developed in one cultural context in another. The work of Freud,



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Piaget, and Kohlberg are examples. In some cases, findings lend support to the universality of behaviors in vastly different cultural settings (e.g., stages in language development and the sequence and timing of such behaviors as smiling, walking, stranger and separation anxiety, and pubertal development). On the other hand, results have sometimes suggested a need for modification of certain culture-bound concepts (e.g., intelligence, medical diagnosis, and, sometimes, gender behavior). For a comprehensive review of some of the significant findings of indigenous (or native) psychologists, see Kim and Yang (2005).

One of the most frequently used approaches to describing, explaining, and understanding similarities and differences in a variety of cultural contexts was presented by Triandis (1989). This is the dimension of **individualism-collectivism** (IND-COL). A culture characterized as **individualist** is made up of *people who are responsible to themselves and their family and whose individual achievement is paramount*. Frequently mentioned examples of such cultures are the United States and most European societies. A **collectivist** culture, on the other hand, is thought to consist of *people who consider the group to be most important with an emphasis on traditions, cooperation, and a sharing of common goals and values*. Cultures so characterized include most of Asia, Africa, and South America. However, in recent years, use of these characteristics has often been too limiting and it has been recognized that components of each are found in most cultures and even within specific individuals (Green, Deschamps, & Paez, 2005; Triandis, 1995). Fischer and his colleagues (2009) have recently reported promising results on the development and validation of a research instrument for measuring the descriptive norms related to individualism-collectivism.

By focusing on cross-cultural material, we hope to provide readers with opportunities to expand their awareness and sensitivity to global similarities and differences in human development and to reduce ethnocentric thinking. The cross-cultural perspective complements and extends the work of earlier researchers who successfully presented the more traditional, but often culture-specific, approach to understanding lifespan development by offering a broader world view. By allowing readers to experience variations in behavior not normally found in their own societies (e.g., accelerated formal operational thought among some Asian populations, decreased susceptibility to visual illusions among certain African groups, and highly developed mathematical skills among Dutch children), this perspective contributes to our understanding of human adaptation. Perhaps most important, it encourages a closer look at the interconnections among culture, development, and behavior—a major theme in contemporary developmental psychology.

While we certainly are not the first to stress the importance of looking at cross-cultural data, we believe we give it greater emphasis because, as Segall so aptly stated three decades ago, "It is to . . . theories of ecological,

cultural, and socialization forces that we must turn for the most promising insights into why different peoples develop different . . . skills or develop the same skills at different rates” (1979, p. 129).

The mention of socialization practices, and the variety of ways in which we are influenced by ecological factors, leads us to another of our major themes.

### **An Ecological Model**

The importance of viewing behavior within its social setting was first recognized not by psychologists but by sociologists, who stressed the importance of the individual’s subjective view. Among the early proponents of this view were C. H. Cooley (1902), W. I. Thomas and F. Znaniecki (1927), and G. H. Mead (1934). When psychologists became interested in the topic, they tended to ignore the social context in favor of the cognitive processes. Such analysis was extended beyond the individual to the study of the environment with the introduction of the concepts of “psychological field” and “life space” by Kurt Lewin (1935). Explicit recognition of the need to study an individual’s subjective view of social reality came with the pioneering work of MacLeod (1947) and has been extended by many others, including Triandis (2008).

One of the most important contributions to these evolving ideas, and one on which much of our presentation is based, is the ecological model presented in the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner (1975, 1977, 1979, 1986, 1989, 1993, and 2005). In its original form, this model divided a child’s environment into four nested and interrelated systems or contexts (one more was added later) and allowed us to see and understand (within a broad framework) how patterns of interaction within the family and the wider society are influenced by and in turn influence the connection between development and culture. Each of these systems involves relationships defined by expected behaviors and roles. For example, a child behaves very differently at home, in school, or with playmates. Take a moment and reflect on your own behavior as a child in these settings. Can you remember how your behavior differed in each setting?

When relationships between systems are in harmony, development proceeds smoothly. Consider the relationship between home and school as an example. If expectations are much the same in both settings (e.g., try to do your best work, be careful and neat), individuals are more likely to succeed and do well than if expectations differ significantly from one setting or environment to another. Bronfenbrenner’s family-centered approach has allowed others to adapt and apply his model to a variety of contemporary issues and to develop applied programs involving parent education, counseling, disabilities, day care, and early childhood programs.

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*Can you find the Western anthropologist in this picture?*  
(© Marcin Jamkowski/Adventure Pictures / Alamy)



*Noted anthropologist, Dr. Dawn Chatty, discussing local problems with Harsous tribal member in Sahmah, Oman, in the Arabian Peninsula.*  
(© James L. Stanfield/National Geographic Society)

## The Developmental Niche

If Bronfenbrenner is correct in his view that culture and environment make significant contributions to one's development (and we believe that they do), one might ask, "How does this happen and how can we better understand the processes taking place?"

One possible answer is provided by the cross-cultural developmental work of Harkness (2005), Parmar, Harkness, and Super (2004), and Super and Harkness (1986, 1994, 1999, 2002). Based on an extensive series of studies among Kipsigis-speaking communities in Western Kenya, Super and Harkness, a psychologist–anthropologist research team, have presented a way of bringing together and integrating findings from the two disciplines. Called the **developmental niche**, it provides *a framework for understanding how various aspects of a culture guide the developmental process by focusing on the child as the unit of analysis within his or her sociocultural setting or context*. It is compatible, in many respects, with the ideas put forth by Bronfenbrenner and, in combination with it, comprises another major theme of this text.

## A Developmental Orientation

It is well-recognized that most of our behavior does not take place at isolated periods in our lives but rather evolves and continually develops throughout the lifespan. Although the body of cross-cultural research literature is significant, it frequently resembles "a confused mosaic of contradictory findings" (Gardiner, 1994). This may explain, in part, why none of the books that currently examine cross-cultural topics systematically presents a developmental perspective as we do here. Not all of the behaviors covered in this text will always fit neatly into this orientation or be easily explained by some of the other themes or approaches. However, many do and, where appropriate, we demonstrate how these behaviors evolve and change as individuals develop across the lifespan and across cultures.

To illustrate the importance of looking at behavior from a developmental orientation, let us briefly consider the development of memory and attention, or the increased ability to organize information. As children, we begin to think, attend, and store away memories. As adolescents and adults we develop the ability to make inferences, understand reversibility, and make use of abstract thought. Information that may have been remembered in childhood as a list can now be recalled in adulthood as a total pattern. What is your earliest memory? How old do you think you were? Why do you think this memory is so important?

This brings us to another theme the chronological-within-topics approach.

### **A Chronological-Within-Topics Approach**

In this text, we have decided to look at selected topics for which a large literature of cross-cultural research exists and discuss these topics chronologically—from the early beginnings of development through the last years of life.

Using this chronological-within-topics approach, we hope to effectively demonstrate how behavioral processes evolve and change as individuals pass from infancy and childhood through adolescence and into adulthood. As a result, it should become clear that our behavior is dynamic and involves change, which is at times orderly and predictable and at other times chaotic and unreliable, that both individual and cultural similarities and differences exist, and that specific cultural influences become important at different times and in different cultures. This approach includes basic concepts, principles, and theories that describe physical, psychological, cognitive, social, and personality changes that occur across the lifespan in a variety of cultural contexts.

### **Another Piece of the Developmental Puzzle: The Human Genome**

In recent years, findings from the neurosciences have begun to significantly influence the study of human development. It is becoming increasingly necessary to take into account the role of genes and biological principles and their interaction with one's environment and psychological experiences. As Segalowitz and Schmidt (2003) point out, "While we see both cognitive and affective development—the mainstay of developmental psychology—as having interesting parameters being set by neurological factors, new discoveries in developmental neuroscience also highlight the plasticity and adaptability of the system. Patterns of development are both biologically rooted in our brains and heavily influenced by experience. And the biological influences are manifested through experience" (p. 65).

In addition, with the completion of the thirteen-year Human Genome Project (1990–2003), we have seen an explosion in the study of genetics and the discovery of specific genes that may be responsible for a variety of physical illnesses and psychological conditions, including cancer, diabetes, heart disease, multiple sclerosis, asthma, depression, and many others. There are even those who believe this knowledge could lead to the ability to double the lifespan through a variety of new treatments and therapies. For example, a group of Danish researchers have recently predicted that more than half of all babies born since the year 2000 in France, Italy, Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States, Japan, Canada, and other countries with long

life expectancies will celebrate their hundredth birthdays (Christensen, Doblhammer, Rau, & Vaupel, 2009).

The Genome Project's goals of identifying all the approximately 20,000 to 25,000 genes in human DNA, determining the sequences of the 3 billion chemical base pairs that make up human DNA, storing this information in databases, improving tools for data analysis, and transferring related technologies to the private sector have largely been accomplished. However, analysis of the data, its application to specific situations, and implications for the legal, ethical, and social issues arising from this project will last long in the future. Nevertheless, its findings are exciting and, in many ways, will change the way individuals and their descendants across cultures will live their lives in the generations yet to come.

Advances in genetic engineering and biotechnology raise serious questions in terms of culture and human development. For example, what if you had a child who was born with a growth hormone deficiency? Would you (if you could afford it) pay large sums of money, perhaps as much as \$1,500 to \$2,500 or more, for a series of injections to increase the height of your child at critical stages of his or her development? Would you allow genetic engineering to increase the number of neurons in the brain during fetal development in order to have a potentially "smarter" baby?

Carey (2003) points out that in the past, the greatest effect of culture on humans has been to alter the frequency of alleles (paired genes, alike or different, that affect a trait) and/or genotypes (the genetic makeup of an individual, containing both expressed and unexpressed characteristics). Further advances in genetic engineering could allow scientists to create *new* alleles ". . . thus, changing mutations from a random phenomenon into a deliberate, scientifically guided enterprise" (Carey, p. 216). The result would be individuals with entirely new and unique genotypes that are not now a part of the human genome. We can only imagine (and even that is difficult) what the effect might be on human development and culture.

Physical and cultural changes in human development have always been intertwined. For example, we can observe the many ways in which a culture's attitudes and beliefs about birth control, abortion, and related topics influence its members' social and religious attitudes, as well as its concern with the physical factors of reproductive fitness. A culture's attitudes towards marriage—who and who will not make appropriate partners—affect the ways in which dating and mating are structured. Advances in international travel (and Internet communication) have increased contact among different cultures, sometimes resulting in an increased number of cross-cultural relationships, intermarriages, and bicultural children, with a subsequent reduction in "the reproductive isolation of human populations" (Carey, 2003, p. 215).

Only the future will determine how far the genetic revolution will take us. While genes and their influences will not be one of the major topics upon

which we will have much to say, we recognize the importance of this newly expanding research and urge the reader to learn more about it, as will we, when stories related to it appear in various media.

## ◆ PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

We believe that a book emphasizing process, content, and skill (at understanding and interpreting cross-cultural behavior), but avoiding unnecessary jargon and seeking a broad perspective, provides a number of benefits to readers. Therefore, part of our focus is on the *everyday experiences* encountered by individuals of differing ethnic backgrounds within their own society as well as between individuals of different cultural settings. We further believe that if readers come to understand the processes involved, they can begin to understand how to apply these principles for a deeper insight into the events and issues that touch their lives beyond the boundaries of their home, neighborhood, classroom, community, and nation. The material is continually related to issues and concerns that are important and relevant to all of us. Efforts are made to encourage critical thinking that allows one to examine, question, explore, analyze, and evaluate a variety of everyday situations within diverse cultural contexts.

There is an adage that states, “Tell me and I’ll forget . . . show me and I’ll probably remember . . . involve me and I’ll never forget.” Simply stated, this is another of our important themes—practical application. Many of today’s texts are written for social science majors planning graduate study and frequently emphasize laboratory research—a shortcoming already recognized in our earlier comments on the need for an ecological point of view. While we feel a developmental text should be grounded in carefully researched theory, we also believe that if it is to be maximally useful, it should avoid jargon and focus on readers’ “real-life” experiences, and ultimately assist them to relate more effectively with other individuals and in diverse environments. This is especially true today as our world, even at the local neighborhood level, becomes increasingly multicultural.

These goals are accomplished in several ways. In writing this text, we have selected topics that have meaning for one’s daily living: socialization, the family, cognition and language, personality, social behavior, issues of gender and sexuality, and health and illness issues.

We don’t expect you to accept what we say without question. We believe in the adage mentioned earlier, and we try to practice what we preach by providing opportunities for you to question, explore, and analyze the topics presented. In doing this, we hope you will arrive at a better understanding of your own behavior, modifying it where necessary and desirable and developing and improving your cross-cultural interactions with others, now and in the future.



## ◆ OVERVIEW OF THE TEXT

Since the transition from theory to practice cannot be accomplished simply by reading about applications, we make an effort to present the material in the chapter in such a way that it explicitly encourages your active involvement.

First, this chapter opens with a focus on issues and behaviors that are to be addressed. This gives you an idea of what is covered in the chapter, and it allows you to formulate your own ideas. For example, “What are the benefits of studying development cross-culturally?” “What are the effects of culture on socialization?” “How does children’s play differ from one culture to another?” “In what ways are adolescents similar or different throughout the world?” “How do cultures treat their elders or older adults?”

Second, within the narrative, each new idea is defined, highlighted, and illustrated with cultural examples (many from the authors’ own experiences) that, hopefully, you would find both relevant and entertaining.

Third, real-life examples of cultural variations in childbirth, effects of culture on learning styles, growing old in different cultures, cultural variations in adolescent identity, and other important topics are presented and discussed.

Fourth, throughout the chapter you are frequently asked to stop and consider what you have read and try to apply ideas and concepts to your own life experiences. When you can do this, you will have a better understanding and are more likely to remember information that is relevant to your life.

Finally, this chapter closes with a section on “Further Readings.” Included are materials from a variety of sources that we think are interesting, informative, entertaining, and easy for you to locate. You will also find several “Study Questions” to help you focus on important points in this chapter.

## ◆ SOME CROSS-CULTURAL TEASERS

As we bring this chapter to a close, we would like to leave you with a few “cross-cultural teasers,” or questions for which we provide partial answers.

- Are there any universals in human development? If so, what are they? One example of a universal is gender-role assignment. All societies appear to socialize boys and girls into gender roles (e.g., generally allowing more aggressive behavior among boys and encouraging more caring behavior among girls).
- How can we explain cross-cultural differences in such behaviors as dependence and independence? Part of the answer depends on where infants sleep after they are born. The United States is known as a culture that emphasizes individual achievement; parents generally place babies

## INTRODUCTION

in their own cribs in their own rooms. Japan, a collectivist culture, encourages dependence or interdependence; children are allowed to sleep with parents, often for many years. How does this affect development?

- Adolescents in many of the world's cultures confront the problem of identity, or try to answer the question "Who am I?" For some, living in Nigeria, it is a relatively easy task. For others, growing up bicultural in New York City, it is more difficult.
- Eating disorders, such as anorexia and bulimia, are common in many Western societies. Do young people throughout the world all strive to attain the ideal body image? You may be surprised by some of the answers found in Japan, Australia, and other countries.
- How do different cultures view their elderly? Is grandparenting the same everywhere? We'll give you some answers to these questions from China, Japan, the United States, and other countries.
- How does family life differ from one culture to another? In some societies, the roles of mothers and fathers may surprise you. Did you know children in some cultures become more closely attached to their fathers than to their mothers? Why would this be the case?
- An increasingly common disorder among older adults today is Alzheimer's disease. Did you know that people suffering from this disease are treated differently by their caregivers if the patient and caregiver are Hispanic, Native American, or Anglo?
- What's important in selecting a marriage partner—money, good looks, security, health? You'll be surprised at some of the views expressed by men and women from cultures around the world. How many chickens or cows do you think you're worth on the marriage market?

Have we gotten your attention? Do you want to know the answers to these and other interesting cross-cultural questions? Would you like to know about some of the similarities and differences in human behavior and how people live their "lives across cultures?" Then turn the page and read on.

## ◆ SUMMARY

This chapter introduces the topic of cross-cultural human development and provides definitions of important terms and concepts. Discussion centers on several themes to be used in organizing developmental topics in a variety of cultural settings. These themes include a cross-cultural perspective, an ecological model, the developmental niche, a developmental orientation, a chronological-within-topics approach, and an emphasis on practical applications. Suggestions are given for using the material in ways to help readers develop a greater understanding of, and sensitivity to, those of a different

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cultural background than their own and develop and improve any cross-cultural interactions they might experience.

### ◆ STUDY QUESTIONS

Explain what is meant by the term *cross-cultural human development*.

Demonstrate a familiarity with the important themes presented in this chapter, including the cross-cultural perspective, ecological model, developmental niche, developmental orientation, and chronological-within-topics approach.

Comment on the goals set forth for the field of cross-cultural psychology.

### ◆ FURTHER READINGS

Dave Barry. (1992). *Dave Barry Does Japan*. New York: Fawcett Columbine. An irreverent view of Japanese culture by one of America's premiere humorists. Witty and sometimes insightful. Contains discussion of such topics as "Failing to Learn Japanese in Only Five Minutes (Very much good morning, Sir)," "Lost in Tokyo (Looking for plastic squid)," and "Humor in Japan (Take my tofu! Please!)."

Michael Brannigan. (Ed.). (2004). *Cross-Cultural Biotechnology*. Rowman & Littlefield. Fifteen essays from international academics and practitioners address a broad range of legal, ethical, and social issues in biotechnology, underscoring the relevance of cultural values. Topics include the International Human Genome Project and research ethics in East Asia.

Hubert J. M. Hermans & Harry J. G. Kempen. (1999). Moving Cultures: The Perilous Problems of Cultural Dichotomies in a Globalizing Society." *American Psychologist*, 54, 1111–1120. The authors discuss the impact of globalization and compare Western cultural tradition with the rest of the world. They comment on the potential influence of cultural connections and some of the complexities associated with cultural change.

Terri Morrison & Wayne A. Conaway. (2006). *Kiss, Bow, or Shake Hands* (2nd ed.). Avon, MA: Adams Media. Updated and expanded guide to international behaviors. Most useful for business travelers but also of value for tourists and travelers or anyone living or interacting with a culture other than their own. Very informative.

James Shreeve. (2006). *The Greatest Journey*. National Geographic, 209 (3), 60–73. A very readable account of genes, DNA, migration, and the origins of modern human life and culture.

The Human Genome Project. For information about this project—its history, research, publications, educational resources, and new programs based on data and resources from The Human Genome Project, The Microbial Project, and systems biology—go to this Web site [http://www.ornl.gov/sci/techresources/Human\\_Genome/home.shtml](http://www.ornl.gov/sci/techresources/Human_Genome/home.shtml).



## THEORIES AND METHODOLOGY

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*Justin Tyme, an undergraduate major in psychology, has returned from a month in Thailand, where he attempted to collect data for his senior thesis. This was his first visit to a foreign country, and it was a memorable, but unsatisfying, experience. Why? Because Justin was not well-prepared and made several serious (and avoidable) mistakes. First, he traveled to a culture he knew little about (because it sounded exotic). People spoke a language (Thai) he did not understand and which he found difficult to read, write, or speak in the brief time he was there because of its complexity (44 consonants, 28 vowel forms, 5 tones, and written script). He found the weather too hot and humid, the food too spicy, and life in the village where he was doing his research “too slow.” He had difficulty finding people to help translate his English-language, Western-designed, marital-role preference scale so that it would have comparable meaning in Thai. He was upset because the few subjects he was able to get often didn’t arrive exactly on time (Asians, in general, are not as time conscious as Westerners, especially Americans), and when they did, they usually told him “Mai pen rai” (Don’t worry). Finally, representative samples were difficult to obtain in a rural area that would match his samples back in Chicago, Illinois.*



*Dr. Kitty Litter, an anthropologist from Cornell University, recently spent six months doing an ethnographic field study among a group of Indians in the highlands of Peru. Not only was she fluent in Spanish, the most widely spoken language in the country, but she also had a working knowledge of two native languages—Quechua and Aymara—from two previous trips to the country. She had read extensively about the customs of the tribal groups in this area and was very fond of the food. She especially enjoyed the tropical climate along the coast and the cooler temperatures in the mountains. She had spent considerable time designing the questions she was going to ask and had even prepared a Quechuan-language version of a psychological instrument she hoped to validate while there.*



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Theories and methodology—sound exciting, don’t they? Perhaps not, but these two topics are central to understanding what happens in cross-cultural human development. In this regard, we have two goals for this discussion of theories: first, to provide a foundation for those who do not have a background in human development (or could benefit from a review of major concepts) to appreciate their contributions to our efforts to better understand behavior; second, to provide a framework for identifying complex human behavior and experience as it occurs within different cultural contexts and to explore possible reasons for the similarities and differences that are found in societies around the world. If research (cross-cultural or otherwise) is not carefully designed, conducted, analyzed, and understood, any findings that result are of little value. So, we’ll try to make the discussion of these topics as simple, relevant, and interesting as possible.

## ◆ THEORIES OF DEVELOPMENT

Why do we study human development? There are many reasons, but basically we do it to *understand, explain, predict*, and (in some instances) *control behavior*. To achieve these goals, we need to be familiar and comfortable with theories and their important concepts. As a graduate student in England, I (Gardiner), while trying to select a topic for my doctoral dissertation, was asked by my major adviser whether there were an area of psychology with which I felt particularly uncomfortable. Without hesitation, I immediately replied, “Theories.” (I shouldn’t say this but, as an undergraduate student, I frequently skipped over theories because I found them boring, confusing, and too abstract.) When it was suggested that I devote the next three years to the development of my own theory in order to decrease this discomfort (a form of theoretical desensitization, I guess), I thought this was a “daft idea.” Of course, I didn’t tell this to my adviser! However, develop my own theory I did (Gardiner, 1966). Not only did I really enjoy doing my original doctoral research (on “newspapers as personalities”), but, when it was over, I felt much less threatened by theoretical concepts and gained a greater appreciation for the central role theories play in the social sciences. We hope you feel the same way when you reach the conclusion of this chapter (don’t skip over them; they *are* important!).

### What Is a Theory?

Simply stated, a **theory** is a *set of hypotheses or assumptions about behavior*. A theory consists of guesses or speculations that allow us to answer such questions as “Why does a particular behavior occur?” For example, why are Chinese children generally calmer, less active, and easier to soothe when distressed than Western children? Why are ethnic customs and values of greater

importance to some minority youths than others? What factors most influence the ways in which contemporary cultures treat their elderly?

When we study human development, we can't look at all aspects of an individual's, group's, or culture's behavior. Theories help us organize our ideas and limit what we look at, and serve as a guide (or blueprint) in the collection of data. Sometimes, it seems as if there are as many theories as there are people. In a sense, there are, because each of us has our own informal, unscientific, unverified, and highly idiosyncratic theories. Built up over years of personal observation and experience, these informal theories help us understand the behavior of those with whom we come into contact. For example, when we meet someone for the first time, our informal theory of personality helps us decide whether we like or dislike this person, whether we want to interact with this person again, and so on. However, we must go beyond these informal theories to truly understand and explain the complexity of human development. We need theories that are more formalized and rooted in scientific principles if we are to be able to compare and contrast behavior within and across cultures and draw conclusions about similarities and differences. In the pages that follow, we discuss six theories. While you may (or may not) be familiar with some or all of them, it might be helpful, in terms of our discussion, to think of the theories of Piaget, Kohlberg, and Erikson as traditional or mainstream psychological theories that focus on the individual, with primary attention to internal cognitive processes (e.g., knowing and thinking, moral reasoning, and psychosocial development). On the other hand, the theories of Bronfenbrenner, Super and Harkness, and Vygotsky can be viewed as interactionist theories, because they focus on the interactions between the individual and his or her environment in specific psychological domains (e.g., ecology and the interrelationship of the developing individual and his or her changing physical and social environment, links between children's behavior and the developmental niche in which they are raised, and cultural influences on development of language, thinking, and guided participation).

Before looking at each of these theories, consider a comment made by Judith Rich Harris in her book *No Two Alike*, in which she proposes a new theory of personality but observes, "Someone who thinks up a new theory is the last person who should be trusted with the job of testing it. A new theory should be tested by independent researchers who aren't cronies of the theorist . . . proposing theories and doing research to test them are jobs that should be carried out by different entities" (2006, p. 265). In the case of the theories discussed here, this sometimes happens and sometimes not.

### **Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model**

One of the most important contributions to the study of human development within cultural contexts, and one on which much of our presentation is

based, is the ecological model presented in the pioneering work of Urie Bronfenbrenner (1975, 1977, 1979, 1986, 1989, 1993, 2005). At the center of Bronfenbrenner's thinking is his contention that human development is a dynamic, interactive process in which human beings create the environments in which they live and that these, in turn, help shape their own development.

Simply stated, this model views behavior and development as a shared function of the characteristics of the individual (biological or genetic factors and personality) and the environment (social, physical, and cultural aspects of one's present surroundings, such as family, school, and neighborhood), along with the larger contemporary and historical contexts of which these are an integral part, such as society and period in which one is born and lives his or her life.

Bronfenbrenner's original model has been "undergoing successively more complex reformulations to attain its present, still-evolving form" (Bronfenbrenner, 1999, p. 4). Recent versions of this approach (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) have been renamed the *bioecological model*. By doing so, it identifies a child's own biology as a critical environmental factor affecting development, while incorporating earlier concepts, along with new ideas, into a series of propositions that focus more directly on the role of environment and the concept of time. Those readers who want to know more about this evolving model, which remains more theoretical than practical at the moment, are directed to the references mentioned earlier.

In this text, we have chosen to focus primary attention on Bronfenbrenner's earlier model (without the recent propositions), which we believe continues to offer significant advantages for viewing and understanding the connection between culture and human development. Where appropriate, we refer to some of his more recent ideas and formulations.

The **ecology of human development**, as defined by Bronfenbrenner, involves "*the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation throughout the life course, between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded*" (2005, p. 107). In short, an individual is seen not as a passive, static, and isolated entity on which the environment exerts great influence (much like a *tabula rasa*, or blank slate), but as a dynamic and evolving being that interacts with, and thereby restructures, the many environments with which it comes into contact. These interactions between individual and environment are viewed as two-directional and characterized by reciprocity. For example, while a child's development is being influenced and molded by parents, family, school, and peers, she is, at the same time, influencing and molding the behavior of others. Take a moment and try to think of examples from your own life where situations like this occurred in your family, at school, or among friends. Why were they important?

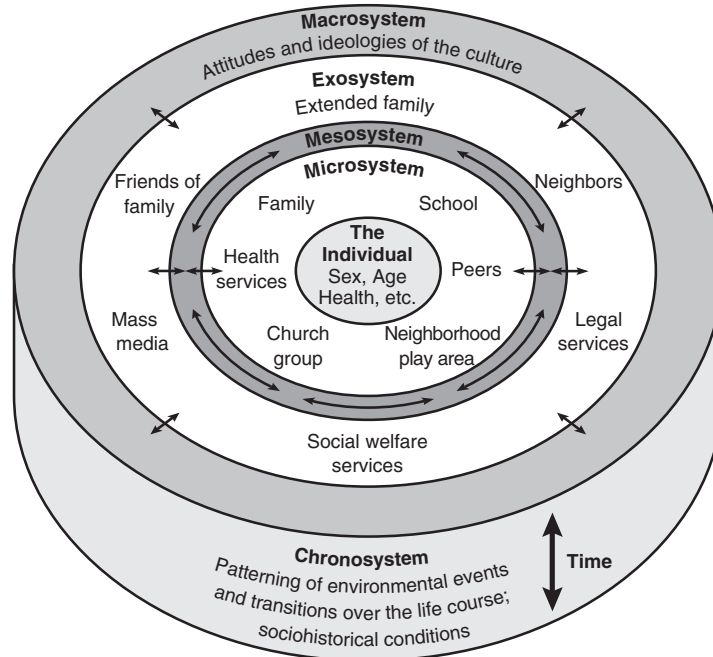


Bronfenbrenner has suggested that an individual's perception of the environment is often more important than "objective reality," and that this perception influences one's expectations and activities. A recognition and acceptance of the critical role played by the cultural or environmental context seem particularly suited to the study of human behavior and development.

In his critique of traditional research carried out on children, Bronfenbrenner has stated, "Much of contemporary developmental psychology is the science of the strange behaviors of children in strange situations with strange adults for the briefest possible periods of time" (1977, p. 513). In other words, while striving to achieve experimental rigor and control, we have often lost sight of the scientific and practical relevance of our findings by ignoring how the same phenomena might occur outside such artificial environments. One of the other major goals of this text is to stress the relevance and practicality of such findings. For example, while social workers have employed Bronfenbrenner's model since the 1970s, recent studies demonstrate a deeper understanding and wider application of ecological principles in actual practice (Ungar, 2002).

The ecological model allows us to go beyond the setting being immediately experienced—whether in a laboratory, a classroom, or a backyard—and permits the incorporation of indirect, but nevertheless very real, effects from other settings, as well as from the culture as a whole. Bronfenbrenner originally divided the ecological environment into four **nested systems**: *microsystem*, *mesosystem*, *exosystem*, and *macrosystem* (see Figure 1). This conceptualization of the ecological environment has been retained in his more recent bioecological model. A fifth system, the *chronosystem*, with its focus on time and sociohistorical conditions, has been mentioned only occasionally in the literature, and seldom by Bronfenbrenner himself. However, as we shall soon see, the concept and importance of time has become a more significant part of the newly reformulated bioecological model and was so recognized in the last integrative book he wrote on his model before he died in 2005 (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

**The Microsystem.** In Figure 1, the first level, the microsystem, is the layer closest to the child and contains those structures with which the child has direct contact, for example, family or preschool and resulting behaviors, such as dependence, independence, cooperation, or competition. This is the most basic level, the one at which individuals engage in face-to-face interactions, and their behaviors frequently reflect social position. Bronfenbrenner (1994) expanded his original definition to include home, church, school, hospital, or day care center. Other factors include the effects of the physical environment on behavior, including background noise, crowding, and the number and types of toys available to a child. For a real-life example of the microsystem, consider Charlie, the youngest child in his



**FIGURE 1** Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of Human Development

Source: From Kopp, C.B. and Kaslow, J.B., *The Child: Development in a Social Context*, 1st, © 1982. Based on data from *The Ecology of Human Development* by Urie Bronfenbrenner. Electronically reproduced by permission of Pearson Education, Inc. Upper Saddle River, NJ.

family. He attends preschool while his mother and father are at work. It is here that he learns to play “nicely” with other children, share toys, obey the teacher, and develop basic social skills.

**The Mesosystem.** The second level, the mesosystem, recognizes that the individual microsystems in which a child functions are not independent but are closely interrelated or connected and influence each other. This layer provides the connection between these structures. According to Bronfenbrenner's newly revised definition, the mesosystem is made up of two or more microsystems (e.g., home and day care, day care and school, or family and peer group). It is the mesosystem that links or ties together information, knowledge, and attitudes from one setting that help to shape behavior or development in another setting. For example, while parents emphasize the importance of learning at home, preschool teachers provide stimulating activities at school that motivate a child to learn more. In this regard, Steinberg, Darling, and Fletcher (1995) looked at authoritative parenting and adolescent adjustment within the ecological setting and reported a number of

benefits, including lower levels of delinquency and substance abuse among both male and female adolescents. Charlie's older sister, Sirina, is in second grade and is functioning in the mesosystem. For example, Siri's mother frequently meets with her daughter's teacher, Miss Santiago, to discuss her progress in school and seek advice on improving her study habits at home.

**The Exosystem.** Beyond the child's immediate environment are social settings of which he may not be a part but which, nevertheless, interact with one or more structures in his microsystem and influence his development in significant ways. These settings or institutions make up the third level—the exosystem. As defined by Bronfenbrenner, the exosystem includes formal settings, such as parents' place of work or community health and welfare institutions (e.g., hospitals). Bronfenbrenner (2005) provides an example of the link between the home and a parent's workplace for the developing child and of the link between the home and her children's peer group for the developing adult. Other less formal settings might include the extended family (aunts, uncles, cousins, friends, and neighbors). Malinee, Charlie and Siri's older sister, is experiencing daily activities within the exosystem; for example, although she doesn't know much about her father's work, she plays on a mixed-sex soccer team sponsored by his athletic apparel company after school and is learning the importance of team work and discipline.

**The Macrosystem.** This is the most complex system and is found in the outermost circle and consists of the customs, values, and laws considered important in the child's culture. The focus is on the consistencies among a wide variety of settings within a given society or culture. For example, in many countries there are striking similarities in the form and function of such familiar settings as school playgrounds, post offices, shopping malls, and even fast food restaurants. This system or level does not pertain to a specific context or environmental setting but is important because it has an effect on all the previous systems. It includes the customs, values, and laws of a child's culture and determines what are acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. For example, Macinnes, the oldest child in the family we have been looking at, is in high school, and, as a result of his accumulated experiences in these previous systems, is considered to be a smart, well-behaved, conscientious, helpful, and law-abiding member of his community and an example for his younger siblings, as well as friends and peers.

**The Chronosystem.** In Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, the exact role of the chronosystem is somewhat difficult to describe because it has not received the same attention as have the other four systems. In fact, the term does not always appear in the reformulated bioecological model although the elements that characterize it—time and sociohistorical conditions—constitute a major part of the new model (Bronfenbrenner,

2005). In his final writing, Bronfenbrenner makes the point that “the chronosystem is a methodological construct; the remaining four are theoretical but can also become substantive when put to empirical use” (p. 165). In general, this layer focuses on time as it relates to a child’s various environments. For example, it includes the physiological changes that occur as the child matures and his or her reactions to these changes as well as the changed environment in which he or she now functions. Another example is the timing of the death of an important person in the child’s life, such as a parent, sibling, or grandparent. Each of the children mentioned above was all exposed to the severe economic difficulties of the year 2009 and beyond. However, due to their age differences, they experienced events in unique ways, and the impact on their development varied. For example, Macinnes became much more aware of economic issues and moral behavior as they affected the country and his family, Malinee had to cut back on some of her activities due a reduction in family income, and Siri and Charlie, because they were so young, didn’t always understand what was happening but often heard their parents discussing concerns about money issues.

When studying individual behavior, a great deal of past and present developmental research has tended to view it either at a fixed point in time or, if over a long period of time (and if conducted longitudinally), has assumed little or no change in an individual’s personal characteristics or in his or her environmental or ecological setting. As Muuss (1996) has pointed out, “time used to be perceived as synonymous with changes in chronological age. In the ecological model, the constancy or change over time (of both E and P) is essential to assessing the nature of the changes during the life course” (p. 320). Bronfenbrenner has used this chronosystem model to help explain how time simultaneously affects the environment (E) and the person (P). According to Muuss, Bronfenbrenner “emphasizes the interacting nature of these changes, and it is the interacting nature of (E) and (P) that Lewin, and more explicitly, Bronfenbrenner, have brought to our attention” (p. 320).

In his later writings, Bronfenbrenner (2000), while not employing chronosystem terminology, placed increasing emphasis on “time and timing as they relate to features of the environment, as opposed to characteristics of the person” (p. 20)—what he has called “space through time: environment in the third dimension” (p. 20). Much of the progress in this area has emerged from researchers, primarily sociologists, using what Elder has called the “life course perspective.” For a discussion of the basic principles of this perspective and recent research, see Elder and Giele (2009).

Muuss provides an example of chronosystem research that might be conducted to investigate behavior among family members and the role time or timing might play in it. He points to the effect the arrival of a new baby might have on parents’ interactions with each other and with other children. “By assessing the mother’s interaction (with the older siblings) before, during, and after pregnancy, research suggests that the mother’s interaction patterns

change rather noticeably as a function of these pregnancy/child-bearing conditions" (Muuss, 1996, p. 320). Steinberg and his colleagues in several studies (1987, 1988, 1995) examined the relationship between the timing of puberty and its effects on family relationships and parent-adolescent distance.

The ecological model, with its emphasis on the analysis of specific behaviors in increasingly complex settings, nicely complements our other themes and provides one of the central focal points around which these themes cluster. In fact, such a multilevel approach significantly expands the possibilities for explaining a variety of behaviors, as does our next approach.

### **Super and Harkness's Developmental Niche**

The concept of the developmental niche (at least the "niche" part) was originally borrowed from the field of biological ecology, where *niche* describes the combined features of a particular animal's environment or habitat. Super and Harkness (1994a) use the example of a robin and a pigeon, both of which might live in the same section of a city park but differ in where they build their nests, the kinds of materials they use, and the kind of food they eat from the surrounding environment. The birds create a distinct niche for themselves based on each of these behaviors. The fact that this concept of a niche can be employed in biology and in psychology demonstrates, as we indicated earlier, that there is some unity to scientific efforts. In fact, much of the usefulness of the developmental niche concept lies in its ability to serve as an integrative framework providing connections among culture, socialization, and ecology. In fact, the framework has been used by the authors and others in conducting research in a wide variety of areas, including cognitive, motor, and language development; temperament; sleep and arousal; emotional expression; literacy; and health. It has been used extensively in the study of **ethnotheories**, or *parents' cultural belief systems about the nature of children, the processes of development, and the meaning of behavior* (Harkness & Super, 1996), as well as in intervention programs for inner-city children (Harkness et al., 2005).

As Sara Harkness and her colleagues (2005) have pointed out, the developmental niche concept owes much to the theoretical thinking and research of several earlier pioneers. For example, there are the "culture and personality" studies of the anthropologists Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead, as well as Beatrice Whiting's idea of parents as "providers of settings" in which children were able to explore a variety of social behaviors. The authors refer specifically to the approach ". . . interwoven in early anthropological accounts of parenting in other cultures, . . . [which] . . . has emerged more recently as a distinctive focus in the developmental, as well as anthropological, literature, drawing from psychological research on parents' ideas as a force in children's development and on the anthropological construct of 'cultural model'" (p. 338). While each of these perspectives resulted in critical contributions, Harkness et al. (2005) state that ". . . none of them accommodate sufficiently

two core issues . . . the integration of various elements in the child's culturally structured environment and the endogenous aspects of individual development that alter the specifics of individual-environment interactions. The developmental niche is a theoretical framework that attempts to acknowledge and integrate this set of considerations" (p. 338).

In applying the term to psychology, Super and Harkness (1994a) state that "at the center of the developmental niche, therefore, is a particular child, of a certain age and sex, with certain temperamental and psychological dispositions. By virtue of these and other characteristics, this child will inhabit a different cultural 'world' than the worlds inhabited by other members of his family—and further, the child's world will also change as the child grows and changes" (pp. 96–97). In recent writing, Harkness and her colleagues (2005) state that "the primary view is to take the place of the child and look outward to the everyday world" (p. 338). Harkness (1999) has also pointed out that, while the approach has been used to analyze the niche of single individuals, it has more often been used to compare and contrast cultures or societies "widely separated in geographic place and historical background. However, flexibility in the degree of generalization is a useful feature of the framework, as it has proved useful in examining variation within a single physical community and in documenting changes in child care that are due to migration or seasonal change" (pp. 284–285). See, for example, Eldering (1995).

Every child's developmental niche consists of three interrelated components (see Table 1). First, there are the physical and social settings of daily life in which a child lives (e.g., nuclear family living typically found in many Western cultures versus extended family arrangements found in many Asian or African countries). Aspects of this component include (1) the kind of company a child keeps (e.g., in rural Kenya, families frequently consist of eight or more children, who serve as ready-made playmates and caretakers), (2) the size and shape of one's living space (e.g., in a large North American home, children have their own rooms compared with families living in overcrowded apartments in Tokyo, where small rooms sometimes serve as living, dining, and sleeping areas), and (3) presence or absence of multiple generations living together (e.g., children, parents, grandparents, and other relatives). The differences in these components are clearly observable in the case of Kamuzu (living with his mother, aged grandmother, and three siblings in a shack in Soweto) and Jeremy (living with his parents and sister in a wealthy neighborhood of Johannesburg, South Africa).

The second component of the developmental niche focuses on culturally regulated customs of child care and childrearing practices. These include (1) informal versus formal learning (e.g., family teaching of important skills within most rural African tribal groups versus formal in-school learning characteristic of most Western societies), (2) independence versus dependence training (e.g., independence practiced by most Western parents versus

**TABLE 1** Components of the Developmental Niche

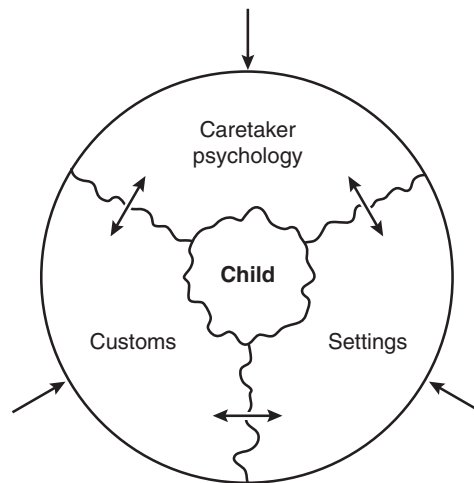
<b>1. PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL SETTINGS OF DAILY LIFE</b>
Size, shape, and location of living space
Objects, toys, reading materials
Ecological setting and climate
Nutritional status of children
Family structure (e.g., nuclear, extended, single parent, blended)
Presence of multiple generations (e.g., parents, grandparents, other relatives)
Presence or absence of mother or father
Presence of multiple caretakers
Role of siblings as caretakers
Presence and influence of peer group members
<b>2. CUSTOMS OF CHILD CARE AND CHILD REARING</b>
Sleeping patterns (e.g., co-sleeping vs. sleeping alone)
Dependence vs. independence training
Feeding and eating schedules
Handling and carrying practices
Play and work patterns
Initiation rites
Formal vs. informal learning
<b>3. PSYCHOLOGY OF THE CARETAKERS</b>
Parenting styles (e.g., authoritarian, authoritative, laissez-faire)
Value systems (e.g., dependence, independence, interdependence)
Parental cultural belief systems or ethnotheories
Developmental expectations

dependence or even interdependence found among the majority of Asian parents), and (3) eating and sleeping schedules (e.g., in many North American and European homes, there are three meals a day at specified times, versus the five to six small meals at unscheduled times customary in many Asian cultures). Again, consider and contrast the educational experiences of Jeremy (who attends an exclusive private school) and Kamuzu (who attends a poorly funded segregated school). Other examples include the customary use of playpens in Holland to keep infants happy and safe and the care of younger siblings by older ones in Kenya (Super & Harkness, 1994a).

Finally, the third component relates to the psychology of the caretakers or the psychological characteristics of a child's parents (e.g., developmental expectations, parental cultural belief systems, and types of parenting styles). According to Super and Harkness (1994a), this component "is an important channel for communicating general cultural belief systems to children, through very specific context-based customs and settings" (p. 98). These authors, like us, see a connection between the developmental niche and Bronfenbrenner's approach when they comment: "Drawing from ecological and systems theory, we suggest that the three components interact with each other as a system . . . to maintain consonance among them. The niche is an 'open system,' however, in that each component interacts independently with elements in the larger culture" (Harkness & Super, 1995, p. 227).

Considering each of these components, think about your family as you were growing up—what were the physical and social settings of your daily life; what kind of childrearing practices or child care did your parents employ; and how would you describe their expectations, belief systems, and parenting styles? By applying this to your own life, you will gain a greater understanding of this approach as well as some of the influences that made you the person you are today. Do you notice differences between you and your siblings?

Super and Harkness propose that these components interact and function as a dynamic but not always completely coordinated system in which the individual and the developmental niche adapt and are mutually influential (see Figure 2). For example, although there is a conformity among certain



**FIGURE 2** A Schematic Representation of the Developmental Niche

Source: From John W. Berry et. al., *Handbook of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, Volume 2, 2nd edition. Published by Allyn and Bacon, Boston, MA. Copyright © 1997 by Pearson Education. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.



elements of the niche (ecological settings consistent with parental beliefs), inconsistency can result from many factors, including external influences, limited resources, or historical change. Consistent with their earlier ideas, Super and Harkness (1999) stress that these three subsystems of the niche “constitute elements of the environment as they are culturally structured in the child’s experience” (p. 286). They point out that this framework can be equally well applied to adult development by expanding the third component—the psychology of the caretakers—to include the psychology of others (e.g., mates, coworkers) who might affect the adult. For an interesting example of the developmental niche in Somalia, see Box 1.

In an important extension of their pioneering approach to development, Super and Harkness (1999) look more closely at “the environment as culture in developmental research.” They discuss, in depth, two anthropological concepts of culture they believe are of critical importance to understanding behavior within context—the immediacy of culture and its integrating nature.

For example, as to the immediacy of culture, it is their position that psychologists (primarily in the past, but many even today) have either ignored culture when considering development or tended to “keep it at great distance from the individual.” In this regard, they are critical of Bronfenbrenner’s original model, which represents culture as the macrosystem. It is their view that “the macrosystem’s placement at the top of a nested hierarchy leaves it with no direct connection to the individual . . . culture exists as the outermost of several circles, while the developing child stands at the center, insulated from the cultural macrosystem by family, neighborhood, school, and other settings and institutions in the microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem” (p. 281). Super and Harkness go on to suggest, “The anthropological insistence on the immediacy of culture not only better reflects the phenomenological experience of daily life but also brings the cultural environment into reach for the empirical scientist” (p. 282).

The integrating nature of culture is seen in the pioneering work of many anthropologists, including Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, and John and Beatrice Whiting, and in much of the research being done today. As Super and Harkness (1999) point out, these efforts suggest “a relatively new and promising agenda for interdisciplinary psychologists as they seek a more sophisticated understanding of behavior and development: Look for structures that integrate experience, and look for their immediacy in everyday life” (p. 283). For more on the ways in which culture serves as an integrating force in development and why the authors’ expanded cultural perspective on the environment is becoming increasingly important, see Super and Harkness (1999, 2002a, 2002b); Harkness and Super (2003); and Harkness, Hughes, Muller, and Super (2004). Some of their suggested research methods and approaches are discussed later in this chapter.

**BOX 1**
**CHILDHOOD IN SOMALIA: AN EXAMPLE  
OF THE DEVELOPMENTAL NICHE**

In an extremely informative and detailed study, Norwegian psychologist Ragnhild Dybdahl explored childhood within the Somali sociocultural context, using the concept of the developmental niche. As part of her study, she conducted open-ended interviews in Mogadishu, Somalia, with twenty mothers, ranging in age from twenty-two to forty (mean age equals thirty), and twenty-three children (mean age equals ten). Most of the women lived with their husbands, and about one-fourth of them had been raised as nomads. The average number of family members was 7.5 and included various combinations of parents, children, grandparents, parents' siblings, and distant relatives staying as long-term guests. Topics of interest included reasons for having children, normative child care, and the roles played by parents and children in the Somali culture.

According to Dybdahl, the first component of the Somali developmental niche is characterized by the culture's economic and health problems; the nomadic way of life, with its emphasis on the extended family and clan; and the child's social and physical settings organized around school and Quaranic school (based on the Koran or sacred teachings of Islam), play, work, and household chores, especially care of younger siblings. The second component is characterized by socialization practices in which the infant, initially spending all its time with its mother, is gradually "distanced from the mother's back, breast and bed to be cared for by someone else." Although formal schooling plays a role, informal education is far more important and is the means by which children are taught such activities as household chores. Quaranic school serves as a mode of traditional education. The third component, based on interview comments from mothers, is characterized by mothers' focus on "physical health, obedience, resourcefulness, helpfulness and hard work," with expectations differing according to a child's age.

Dybdahl reported on the emergence of several themes associated with Somali childhood: (1) a clear responsibility for family and relatives; (2) the importance of such values as pride, hard work, loyalty, and obedience; (3) a constant struggle for survival and good physical health; and (4) the emotional importance attached to children as sources of short- and long-term security.

As a result of her interviews and observations, Dybdahl argues that Somali society represents a mix of "traditionalism and modernism, and collectivism and individualism." According to Dybdahl, her interviews with children provided a look at "the niche from the inside." She points out that "in spite of the difficult living conditions at the time . . . [just before "Operation Restore Hope" in 1989] . . . with war breaking out and relatively

**BOX 1 CONTINUED**

poor health conditions, beliefs in the future and in the possibility to change and improve one's life were recurring themes." She suggests that this may be due to a combination of factors, including the nomadic tradition of "moving on to another place," stoicism, and the belief that family and relatives will provide help if needed.

Dybdahl concludes that children must be studied in the "context and culture in which they live, and of which they are a part." Since developmental outcomes in Western societies have often come to be the norm for many of the world's children, "to avoid ethnocentrism and develop a global psychology, it is necessary to do cross-cultural research." Dybdahl is further convinced that, in order to make what she calls the "person-setting interaction" the focus of investigation, anthropologists and psychologists need to combine their efforts and that the developmental niche "might be a fruitful concept for this purpose." For a more recent report on this research, see Dybdahl and Hundeide, 1998.

In follow-up studies, the author used some of her experiences from this study in the design of a successful psychological intervention program with young children and their mothers in the ecological context of war-torn Bosnia and Herzegovina. Findings revealed severe trauma with wide variations in displays of distress that were greatly helped and reduced by means of a simple and inexpensive intervention program adapted to their needs and to an understanding of the developmental niche in which they lived (Dybdahl, 2001, 2002, 2005).

*Source:* Adapted from "The Child in Context: Exploring Childhood in Somalia," paper presented by Ragnhild Dybdahl at the Twenty-Sixth International Congress of Psychology, Montreal, August 1996. Reprinted by permission.

**Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development**

Jean Piaget (1896–1980), the Swiss-born psychologist, first developed an interest in cognitive development while working with Alfred Binet on intelligence testing in Paris. Piaget became curious about children's thinking and problem solving and why children of the same age made similar mistakes when trying to solve problems. For years, he carefully recorded the cognitive changes he observed in his three children in their home in Geneva. From these and other observations, he theorized that individuals learn by actively constructing their own cognitive world. To Piaget, development is a dynamic process that results from an individual's ability to adapt thinking to meet the demands of an ever-changing environment and, as a result, to formulate new ideas.

**TABLE 2** Piaget's Periods of Cognitive Development

PERIOD	APPROXIMATE AGE	DESCRIPTION	COGNITIVE MILESTONES
Infancy	Birth to 2 years	Sensorimotor	Object permanence
Early childhood	2 to 6 years	Preoperational	Egocentric thinking, use of symbols
Middle childhood	6 to 12 years	Concrete operations	Conservation
Adolescence	12 years and older	Formal operations	Abstract thinking

According to Piaget's view, normal cognitive growth passes through four distinct periods: infancy, early childhood, middle childhood, and adolescence (see Table 2). Each period is highlighted by the development of age-typical cognitive skills. Although Piaget provided age ranges for these various developmental periods, he recognized that the exact age at which a particular individual enters a specified period could be significantly affected by that person's physical, cognitive, or cultural experience—what Bronfenbrenner has referred to as the *ecological setting*.

It was Piaget's belief that cognitive development occurs as a result of children's attempts to adapt to their environments and to make sense of the many experiences taking place around them. The ability to do this requires the systematic development of progressively more complex mechanisms or structures. At the center of this activity lies the scheme. A **scheme** is *an organized pattern of thought or action applied to persons, objects, or events in an effort to make sense of them*. In short, it is a mental picture of the world and the things in it. For example, infants develop a wide variety of schemes during the first few months, including schemes for mother, breast, bottle, and father's voice. Over the years, increased interactions with the environment result in these schemes becoming more sophisticated and better coordinated, so that by the time an individual reaches formal operations, they are capable of thinking about behaviors and imagining their consequences.

According to Piaget, cognitive development and the ability to adapt to the environment depend on the processes of assimilation and accommodation. **Assimilation** is *the process by which new information and ideas are incorporated or fitted into existing knowledge or schemes*. **Accommodation** is *the process of adjusting or modifying existing schemes to account for new ideas and information*. Anyone who has traveled abroad and attempted to make sense of new surroundings or tried to explain new objects or words to a foreign visitor has engaged in assimilation and accommodation—sometimes with success, sometimes with failure, and sometimes with humor! For example, what happens when Hakon from

Norway tries to explain the making of a snowman to Yang, who lives in Malaysia and has never seen or touched snow? In this situation, Yang must make use of accommodation and adjust an existing scheme with which Yang is familiar (perhaps shaved ice) or create a new scheme (snow) to explain this new idea of a snowman. Can you recall a situation in which you have had to use assimilation and accommodation to explain an idea to someone else? Did you find it easy or difficult?

It is through active and open interaction with one's environment or surroundings that individuals learn to balance these twin processes of assimilation and accommodation. In terms of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems approach, these cognitive processes can be said to begin in the family (microsystem); gradually extend to increasingly complex situations that arise in the neighborhood, at day care, or at school (mesosystem); and eventually, as the individual moves into adolescence and adulthood, operate in the workplace (exosystem) and the culture at large (macrosystem).

While there is no doubt that Piaget's theory has had a significant impact on the study and understanding of cognitive development in mainstream Western psychology, his ideas have been challenged on several points. First, some have criticized his emphasis on individual activity occurring apart from social interaction. Such a focus reflects a more individualistic cultural perspective, such as that found in North America and Western Europe, and thereby fails to consider similarities or differences in cognitive development in traditional collectivistic cultures (e.g., China, Japan, and the islands of the South Pacific). Second, some have suggested that Piaget may have overestimated the contribution of motor activity and underestimated the ages at which children are capable of learning and performing a variety of behaviors by themselves. Third, Piaget's claim that once a person moves to a new period of cognitive development, the competencies mastered at that level will be exhibited in other phases of that individual's thinking, does not appear to be fully supported by cross-cultural research findings. While advances may be apparent in some domains of a person's thinking processes, this may not always be true in other domains.

In the beginning, when Piaget was developing his theory and conducting his early studies, he paid little attention to cultural factors and the effects differences might have on cognitive development. However, as Thomas (1999) has noted, "In later years, Piaget did admit some influence of variations in environments, but still considered genetically controlled maturation to be the primary force behind mental development" (p. 65). Whatever one's position is regarding Piaget's theory, it was the first to introduce cognition into developmental psychology and continues to have considerable influence on contemporary research and practice, most notably on social cognition, self-recognition, and attachment and has been applied to the study of cognitive development in many cultures throughout the world—with varying

success. For recent reviews and critiques of Piaget's theory, as well as others presented in this chapter, see Bergen (2008) and Green and Piel (2010).

### Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Development

As we have just noted, Piaget's position was that cognitive development is largely an individual accomplishment, directed and shaped, in part, by the environment (and, in part, by genetics). However, he said little about the importance of the social context in learning. This view was challenged by the Soviet psychologist Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky.

Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934) was one of several children raised in an orthodox Jewish family in Russia. As a young man, he frequently wrote critically about Soviet government policies with which he did not agree. As a result, his scientific writings were banned although his highly acclaimed and influential book *Thought and Language* was finally published in 1934, the year he died of tuberculosis. (For an interesting, and generally ignored, view of how Vygotsky's Marxist orientation influenced the development of his psychological principles and also affected his life, see Gielen and Jeshmaridian, 1999.)

Vygotsky suggested that development is the result of interaction between cultural and historical factors. He believed that the key feature of development lies in matching a child's demands with the requirements of her culture. Vygotsky suggested that there were three major components in this process: the role played by culture, the use of language, and the child's zone of proximal development. Briefly, the **zone of proximal** (nearby) **development (ZPD)** refers to the distance between a child's actual developmental level and the higher-level potential (Vygotsky, 1978). It is *the difference between what children can achieve independently and what their potential level of development might be if given help or guidance*. This concept of the ZPD emphasizes Vygotsky's view that social influences contribute significantly to children's development of cognitive abilities and that mentoring or guidance strengthens their growth.

To tie this into several of the major themes already discussed, let us consider the case of twelve-year-old Dabir, a young Saudi adolescent. We might say that the process of learning, which takes place through mentoring in a number of Dabir's diverse ecological settings (home, mosque, school), defines his developmental niche at a particular time in his life. As Vygotsky would view it, Dabir does not have his own ZPD but participates in a shared ZPD with those around him (e.g., siblings, parents, teachers, and peers). This is also true with regard to Deratu, who does not go to school but learns the important cultural and practical lessons necessary for living in rural Ethiopia from the daily guidance provided by her mother.

While much of Vygotsky's work has been praised for its originality and usefulness, like the pioneering ideas of Piaget, it, too, has its critics. For example, some argue that the zone of proximal development is vague and cannot be adequately measured. Others believe that parts of Vygotsky's theory have been lost or misunderstood in translation and therefore are confusing and incomplete. Nevertheless, the theory still represents an increasingly important contribution to cross-cultural human development, with Vygotsky's zone of proximal development appearing more frequently in educators' teaching methods (Thomas, 1999). As an example, Thomas points out, "Rather than waiting for children to display a particular form of reasoning before attempting to teach skills and knowledge that depend on that form, teachers who follow Vygotsky's lead will attempt to teach the new learnings somewhat before the time children might exhibit their readiness spontaneously" (p. 48).

Interestingly, Bronfenbrenner (2005) points out that Vygotsky, along with others, ". . . served to redefine our conceptions of what a child is, what an environment is, what the nature of interaction is, and what development is—except that we have resisted any effort to think through and be explicit about exactly what these new conceptions are" (p. 63). He even goes as far as to point out that aspects of his model were foreshadowed by Vygotsky's theory and "With respect to the macrosystem, once again it was a Vygotskian concept that paved the way" (p. 100). Vygotsky's theory continues to offer opportunities for finding links between cognitive development within cultural and social contexts, particularly in multiethnic societies such as the United States, Malaysia, India, Canada, Australia, and Continental Europe, where children of different backgrounds approach school and cognitive tasks in a variety of ways.

### **Erikson's Psychosocial Theory**

Erik Erikson, a German-born psychoanalyst and student of Sigmund Freud's daughter, Anna, was the first person to propose a developmental theory encompassing the entire lifespan. Beginning with Freud's stages of psychosexual development, Erikson, a student of anthropology, modified and expanded them to focus greater attention on the social context of development (psychosocial) and less attention on biological and sexual development (psychosexual). Unlike Freud, his emphasis was on the growth of normal or healthy (rather than abnormal or neurotic) personality development, and he was particularly interested in cultural similarities and differences in the socialization of children and the development of identity during adolescence.

Erikson's theory provides a useful framework for attempting to define and unravel some of the major changes in social behavior that take place at various points in the lifespan. As shown in Table 3, he proposed a sequence of

**TABLE 3** Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development

STAGE	CRISIS	PSYCHOSOCIAL TASK
Infancy	Trust vs. mistrust	Develop first social relationship with primary caretaker(s); develop a fundamental trust in life and the world
Toddlerhood	Autonomy vs. shame and doubt	Explore the social environment outside the primary relationship; recognize self as an individual being
Early childhood	Initiative vs. guilt	Negotiate one's place within social relationships; learn about the impact of one's social behavior on others; develop a sense of power
Middle childhood	Industry vs. inferiority	Learn the importance of social norms and the personal consequences of conformity and nonconformity; develop a sense of competence
Adolescence	Identity vs. role confusion	Find social roles and social environments that correspond to one's identity and principles; form one's own identity
Young adulthood	Intimacy vs. isolation	Negotiate one's own identity within the context of intimate relationships
Middle adulthood	Generativity vs. stagnation	Make a contribution to the larger society; acquire a sense of accomplishment and a place in the world
Late adulthood	Integrity vs. despair	Become an integral and active part of one's family and community; come to terms with one's life and choices

eight stages ranging from infancy to later adulthood, each accompanied by a psychosocial crisis requiring resolution if one is to move successfully from one stage to the next. These crises or periods of increased vulnerability and heightened potential involve conflicts between newly developing competencies and a desire to maintain the status quo.

When applying Erikson's theory, there are several points to keep in mind. First, although he assigns an age range to each of his eight stages, these should be considered only as a guide because of differences among individuals. Second, successful resolution of a crisis will depend on how a particular culture views the crisis, the sequence in which a particular stage occurs, and the solution evolving from it. Third, while many of Erikson's original ideas were based on development in Western societies, we attempt to modify some of these to show their potential usefulness and increased applicability in other cultural and ecological settings.



### Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development

The study of moral development is closely identified with the work of Lawrence Kohlberg, who completed his first research as part of his doctoral dissertation. Responses to a series of **moral dilemmas** (*hypothetical incidents involving a conflict between an individual's desires or needs and the rules of society*) by seventy-two boys, ages ten, thirteen, and sixteen years, were analyzed to determine how moral reasoning developed. For each dilemma, subjects were asked to evaluate the morality of a specific act mentioned in the dilemma. On the basis of these findings, Kohlberg (1981) identified three levels of moral development with two stages in each level, representing a more sophisticated and complex orientation toward justice and normative moral principles (see Table 4).

Most children nine years of age or younger are in the preconventional level, but so are many adolescent offenders and adult criminals. Most adolescents and adults are in the conventional level. The postconventional level is not generally reached before the age of twenty, and then generally only by a minority of individuals.

One of the main assumptions underlying Kohlberg's theory is that these six stages are universal and are present in cultures throughout the world. However, Kohlberg concedes that the stage at which individuals complete their development and the time it takes to be completed may vary from one culture to another.

**TABLE 4** Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development

LEVEL	STAGE	BEHAVIOR
I. Preconventional	1. Punishment and obedience orientation	Obeys rules to avoid punishment
	2. Instrumental orientation	Obeys rules to receive rewards
II. Conventional	3. Good-child orientation	Conforms to rules to avoid disapproval by others
	4. Law and order orientation	Conforms to rules to maintain social order
III. Postconventional	5. Morality of contract, individual rights, and democratically accepted law	Accepts and follows laws for the welfare of the larger community
	6. Morality of individual principles and conscience	Believes in and follows self-chosen universal ethical principles

There have been several criticisms of Kohlberg's theory. First, it is sex-biased because it was originally based on studies of male subjects (without the inclusion of any women) in one American city—Chicago. Second, his stages are culturally biased because they are largely dependent upon Western philosophy, and efforts have been made to apply them to non-Western cultures, which may have very different moral viewpoints. Nevertheless, his contribution to the understanding of the development of moral reasoning is important, and we will attempt to modify some of his ideas to show how they might be made more relevant and applicable to other cultural and ecological settings.

We will refer to each of these theories and show how they help to explain various aspects of human development within a wide range of cultural settings and niches. From time to time, we also indicate how these theories might be expanded and modified to better understand and explain cross-cultural similarities and differences in behavior. We now look at some of the methodological issues and approaches related to the study of cross-cultural human development.

## ◆ METHODOLOGY IN CROSS-CULTURAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

There are many different definitions of culture; therefore, it should not be surprising that there are an almost infinite number of ways to approach and measure cultural differences and similarities. For example, psychologists generally tend to focus on individual behaviors, while anthropologists typically tend to look at the behavior of groups. Those doing cross-cultural research in human development frequently make an effort to look at both individual and group behaviors. This is not always easy because each culture and those who live within it, including parents, peers, teachers, and others, have their own ideas and beliefs about children and the ways in which they should develop.

Imagine you are a social scientist (e.g., psychologist, anthropologist, or sociologist) interested in studying the effects of childrearing practices on children's personality development. Looking at your own culture, you find the range of behaviors limited. So, it seems like a good idea to seek out other cultures, which may have different practices, such as swaddling (found among the Hopi Indians in the American Midwest and many Russian and Chinese families), severe independence training (characteristic of certain African tribal groups), or strict dependence or interdependence training (often noted in Japanese families). Taking this approach offers several benefits. First, you are able to increase both the range of independent variables (childrearing practices) and their effects on the dependent variable (children's personality

development). Second, this approach allows (perhaps) for a clearer distinction between biological and environmental influences. For example, if developmental sequences or processes are found to be similar across a variety of diverse cultures, it might suggest that genetic or biological factors are a significant contributor. If, on the other hand, there are wide differences among the cultures, it is more likely that environmental factors play a larger role. Finally, by conducting cross-cultural research in another culture, one becomes aware of his or her own ethnocentric biases that could influence the design, conduct, and interpretation of the results.

Carrying out a cross-cultural study may sound easy. However, here is the heart of the problem: jumping on and off planes in far away and often exotic locations can be exciting, rewarding, and great fun, but it's not all beer and curry! Think about the young undergraduate student, Justin Tyme, in our opening vignette, and consider some other possible difficulties—getting required visas to visit certain countries is often difficult, time consuming, and expensive; you may not be allowed to conduct your research once you get there; you and the local food don't always agree; and you can become frustrated and lonely. In short, you have a great many challenges to meet and resolve. But as Dr. Kitty Litter, the anthropologist in our other vignette, demonstrates, with careful preparation and training, an individual can survive the culture experience and return with important research data. As we see in the next section, although there may be problems in doing cross-cultural research, there are also solutions.

### **Studying Development Cross-Culturally: Some Methods, Problems, and Solutions**

Our intent is not to cover all possible methods, problems, and solutions in this section—besides being impossible, much of this work has been done very well by others. Our aim is twofold: (1) to familiarize you with some of the important information in this area, so that you gain an appreciation for what cross-cultural researchers have to deal with and (2) to prepare you to understand methods and findings.

When conducting research in cross-cultural human development, researchers are interested in discovering principles that are universal to all (or most) cultures (etics), as well as principles that are unique or specific to certain cultures (emics). At the same time, they are concerned that the methods they employ are (1) **objective** (*unbiased and not influenced by a researcher's preconceived notions*), (2) **reliable** (*findings are observed consistently and accepted by independent observers*), (3) **valid** (*behaviors and findings are what the researcher claims them to be*), and (4) **replicable** (*other researchers using the same methods report the same or very similar results*).

In this regard, cross-cultural methods are firmly rooted in basic psychological methodology involving the use of experiments (experimental and control groups to test hypotheses), cross-sectional designs (one-time testing of separate age groups), longitudinal designs (repeated testing of same individuals over time), sequential designs (combination of longitudinal and cross-sectional designs), and correlational studies (measurement of relationships between and among variables).

While cross-cultural psychology shares with its sister social sciences a number of similar needs in designing research (e.g., selecting subjects, defining variables, and choosing appropriate measures and methods), it has to deal with unique issues, for example, the complexity of culture, interdependence of culture and self, indigenous (or native) psychology versus universal psychology, communication across cultures, and interpretation of cultural findings. For detailed discussions of some of these issues and approaches to their resolution, see Berry, Poortinga, and Pandey (1997); Cole (1998); Lonner (2005); Matsumoto and Juang (2004); Smith (2004); and van de Vijver and Leung (2000). For more specific discussions of issues related to measurement in cross-cultural human development, see Friedman and Wachs (1999), Keller and Greenfield (2000), and Super and Harkness (2000). For information on conducting fieldwork studies, see the book by Hobbs and Wright (2006).

Matsumoto (2000) discussed some of the critical questions and issues in this area (pp. 130–134); and because many of these also apply to the conduct of cross-cultural human development research, they are summarized here: (1) *theories and hypotheses*—can the theories under investigation be appropriately applied to all cultures in the study, and do the hypotheses have the same meaning for all subjects independent of their cultural backgrounds? (2) *methods*—are the subjects representative of their culture and are they equivalent for comparative purposes, and are all measures (e.g., scales, items) reliable and valid in all cultures under investigation and do they have linguistic equivalence (determined through the method of back translation from original language to target language and back to original language until all meanings are equivalent)? (3) *data and analyses*—are there any unique cultural responses operating and have they been controlled? and (4) *interpretations and conclusions*—are findings and interpretations free of cultural bias and value judgments based on the researcher's own cultural background? These serious and complex questions must be carefully considered and adequately answered if research across cultures is to make significant contributions to our knowledge about similarities and differences in human development.

Because of the seriousness of one of the issues mentioned above—linguistic equivalence—additional comments regarding the translation and adaptation of instruments and materials from one culture to another deserve special attention. The International Test Commission, consisting of members

from a number of international psychological organizations, has prepared a set of twenty-two specific guidelines for conducting multicultural studies that anyone interested in conducting cross-cultural research should take into account before designing and carrying out a particular study (see van de Vijver, 2001, for a complete listing of these guidelines). These are divided into four categories: (1) context guidelines focusing on general principles for test translations, (2) development guidelines for enhancing equivalence, (3) administrative guidelines for attaining comparability of administration in the use of different language versions, and (4) guidelines for documentation or score interpretations.

One technique widely used to achieve linguistic equivalence when a researcher is unfamiliar with or not fluent in one or more of the languages to be used in a project is **back translation**. This procedure involves *translating material (instruments, surveys, etc.) from a "source" language, (for example, English), into a "target" language, (for example, Arabic) by a bilingual translator fluent in both languages*. The target translation (Arabic) is then translated by another bilingual translator back into the source (English) language. This continues until there is agreement that the translations are linguistically equivalent. Because this technique often relies on literal translation of the material, ignoring such issues as comprehension and readability, a second procedure involving a group or committee with expertise in a variety of areas (language, culture, psychology, anthropology) carries out the translation process until there is agreement that all language versions are equivalent.

As for the use of specific methods, there are numerous ways in which these can be categorized. One approach is to consider four possible types of cross-cultural studies: (1) investigation of theories and concepts originally developed in Western countries as they may (or may not) apply in non-Western settings (e.g., Piaget's stages of cognitive development and Kohlberg's levels of moral development), (2) replication in one culture of studies previously conducted in another culture (e.g., children's acquisition of language skills, peer pressure during adolescence, and expression of emotion in toddlers), (3) collaborative research in which researchers from two or more cultures participate equally in the design and conduct of a study (e.g., assessment of personality in five cultures, a cross-national study of children's behavior with their friends, and exploration of ethnic identity in Russia, Finland, and South Africa), and (4) administration of test materials designed and standardized in one culture but used in other cultures (e.g., tests of intelligence, personality, and socialization).

A popular approach among psychologists, as well as some sociologists, is **cross-cultural comparisons** in which *individuals from at least two different cultural groups are measured and compared on some aspect of behavior* (e.g., European and Asian attitudes toward the criminal justice system). As for individual methods, a technique widely used by anthropologists in their

cultural studies is **ethnography**. Typically, a researcher lives for a time in a culture observing, interviewing, and sometimes testing its members, and produces *a detailed description of a society's way of life, including its attitudes, customs, and behaviors*. The early work of Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, and others are examples. More recently, some interesting work has been done in "the ethnography of speaking," in which sociolinguists studied variations in conversational language in different social contexts (Hymes, 1996, 1999; Nelson, 1992). Information contained in hundreds of these reports has been classified and indexed in the **Human Relations Area Files (HRAF)** and is frequently used in **hologeistic research**, *projects in which hypotheses about such topics as gender differences in aggression or preference for breast versus bottle feeding can be tested on a worldwide sample of more than 340 societies*.

Another approach that has been around for quite awhile but is receiving increased attention from researchers today is the **narrative method**, which, depending on the researcher, looks at a variety of narrative materials, including stories (oral or written), diaries, letters, and their analyses. For a description and discussion of this approach, see the book *Narrative methods* by Atkinson and Delamont (2006).

Matsumoto points out that "in recent years, there has been an interesting merging of research approaches across disciplines, with an increasing number of scientists adopting comparative techniques for use in single-culture immersion research, and comparative researchers adopting qualitative ethnographic methods to bolster their traditional quantitative approach" (p. 39). We see this as a positive sign that these social science disciplines, often at odds, may be showing signs of understanding and learning from each other.

More recently, Matsumoto and Juang (2008) have cited ecological-level studies in which data are obtained from individuals in several different cultures, summarized or averaged, and used as descriptors for those cultures. Two of the most prominent ecological-level studies of culture are the work of Hofstede (2001, 2004) on work-related values in multinational business organizations and Schwartz's value orientations (1995, 2004).

Keller and Greenfield (2000) look more specifically at some of the contributions developmentalists' research make to cross-cultural psychology—methodologically, theoretically, and empirically. For example, in terms of methodology, they point to the use of "contextualized procedures, such as naturalistic observation, suitable for studying behavior in its cultural context" (p. 52). Theoretically, "developmentalists point to the fact that the culturally constructed behavior of adults can be viewed as an endpoint along a developmental pathway, and that adults provide cultural socialization to the next generation" (p. 52). Finally, empirically, they point out that "a developmental approach leads researchers to investigate the culture-specific shape of developmental stages" (p. 52).



*American anthropologist Margaret Mead, who frequently used ethnographic methods, smiles at a Balinese infant.*  
(ASSOCIATED PRESS)

For those who want to know more about cross-cultural research methodology, from a primarily psychological viewpoint, including additional problems and solutions, we recommend the volumes by Segall, Dasen, Berry, and Poortinga (1999) and Berry, Poortinga, and Pandey (1997). Cross-cultural research methodology, as practiced by anthropologists, is discussed in a volume by Ember and Ember (2000).

Let us now take a closer look at some of these issues and several of the research methodologies used in the cross-cultural study of human development, particularly those associated with our two major theoretical viewpoints—the ecological model and the developmental niche.

### **Methods for Assessing Components of the Developmental Niche**

Super and Harkness (1999) have presented, in extensive detail, their suggestions for successfully measuring and assessing the components of the developmental niche. In this section, we provide an overview of their methodology, which, as can be seen in Table 5, involves a combination of psychological and anthropological research techniques. Anyone with a serious interest in the

**TABLE 5** Methods for Studying the Developmental Niche

METHOD	COMPONENT	
	<i>Identified</i>	<i>Measured</i>
Participant observation and ethnographic interviewing	Settings, customs, and caretaker psychology	—
Spot observations and diaries	Settings, customs, and caretaker psychology	Settings (and customs)
Behavior observations	Customs and caretaker psychology	Customs
Semistructured interviews and focus groups	Customs and caretaker psychology	Customs and caretaker psychology
Structured questioning	—	Caretaker psychology and customs
Passive enumeration	Caretaker psychology and customs	Caretaker psychology and customs
Formal methods: free listings, clustering, multidimensional scaling, and consensus analysis	Customs and caretaker psychology	Caretaker psychology and customs

*Source:* From "The Environment as Culture in Developmental Research" by C. M. Super and S. Harkness, 1999, in S. L. Friedman & T. D. Wachs (Eds.), *Measuring Environment Across the Life Span*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association. Reprinted with permission.

developmental niche approach is advised to consult this important work that blends theory and methodology in a way seldom done in the study of cross-cultural human development. It stands as a model for others in the field and as an example of the effort to bring closer together anthropology and psychology that we hope to see more of in the future.

Looking at Table 5, we find several ethnographic, observational, and formal methods (column one), the component to which a particular method contributes qualitative understanding (column two), and, finally, the component for which a method can furnish quantitative information (column three).

According to Super and Harkness, the first group of methods (participant observation and ethnographic interviewing) is indispensable for selecting and understanding important components or units of the developmental environment, and for providing the foundation for determining what should be measured and how to create hypotheses that will demonstrate how various components of the developmental niche are related to each other. They point



out that **participant observation** (*a technique in which an investigator lives for a time with or near a group of people and observes its daily life, activities, and rituals*) and **ethnographic interviews** (*asking group members to describe their culture's typical behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, and values*), if carefully carried out, can help identify elements within each of the three developmental niche components (see Table 1). An example of their use in actual research is in a study by Levy (1996), in which he reports that differences in parental beliefs and practices about learners and teaching in Tahiti and Nepal may be a result of differences in the level of societal complexity in these two cultures.

Other techniques useful in identifying important aspects of all three components, but settings in particular, include spot observations and diaries. Results from **spot observations** (*a series of random unannounced observations of a group, sufficient in number to allow for statistical analysis*) and **diaries** (*written accounts of changes in daily activities kept by participants over varying periods of time, such as a full 24-hour day*) are useful for “describing the physical and social settings of daily life not only in terms of their particular qualities but also in terms of their empirical distributions . . . [and] . . . provide a basis for identifying regularities in settings and activities that may differ between groups, or that one wants to relate thematically to other elements in the niche, or to developmental trends” (Super & Harkness, 1999, p. 304).

Measuring customs (the second component of the developmental niche), according to Super and Harkness, requires (1) a qualitative approach, in which behavioral consistencies are identified either through **direct observation** of a cultural group or by means of **ethnographic descriptions** of its everyday attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors and (2) a quantitative approach producing “measures of individuals’ views on the nature and importance of the custom or measures of the frequency of occurrence of the identified practice, or both” (p. 308). They assert that the ideal approach to assessing and measuring the customs component “demonstrates their existence, documents their occurrence, and explains their relationship to the settings of daily life and to the psychological theories that guide them” (1999, p. 308).

Measuring caretaker psychology or parental beliefs and values (the third component of the niche) also requires a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches. These may include **structured questioning** (frequently based on findings obtained from the methods previously discussed) and **formal methods** originally employed in the cognitive sciences (see Borgatti, 1992, for additional information).

Truly understanding culture and the critical role it plays in human development requires an appreciation of qualitative, as well as quantitative, findings. In the words of Super and Harkness (1999), “Findings in one domain suggest further exploration or reexamination in another, and replication of patterns suggests salient cultural themes” (p. 312). Their unique organizational scheme provides answers to many questions about culture and development while setting forth even more challenges for the future.

## Studying Ecological Systems

Unlike Super and Harkness, who constructed their approach to human development and conducted much of their own research in support of it, Bronfenbrenner has primarily been the developer of ideas and hypotheses, while others have carried out research to show the validity of his approach. To illustrate this, let us briefly look at some examples of representative research carried out on each of the four ecological systems.

First, Brown, Lohr, and Trujillo (1990), in an effort to show how the peer microsystem of adolescents becomes increasingly differentiated and influential in one's behavior, reported on the ways in which both positive (acceptance, friendship, status, and popularity) and negative (drinking, smoking, stealing, cheating) behaviors are associated with different adolescent lifestyle decisions.

Second, Muuss (1996) has stated, "A mesosystem analysis examines the quality, the frequency, and the influence of such interactions as family experiences on school adjustment" (p. 325). An interesting example of this is Epstein's study (1983) of the longitudinal effects of family-school-person interactions on student outcomes, which, unexpectedly, reported that the interaction of family and school was of far greater importance and influence than the variables of race and socioeconomic status. Noted among the findings was a continuing influence of the family and school environments far beyond the early childhood years, lending support to the interaction effects among systems proposed by Bronfenbrenner. As an example, the author pointed out that students experiencing the greatest change in independence were those initially scoring low on this behavior (and whose families failed to emphasize decision making), but who attended schools that placed a strong emphasis on student participation.

Third, as you may remember from our original comments, Bronfenbrenner has asserted that decisions made in the exosystem (e.g., in parents' workplaces) can have an extremely important influence on the life of a child or adolescent (even though they are not a part of that setting). Flanagan and Eccles (1993) effectively demonstrated this point in their two-year longitudinal study of changes in parents' work status and their effects on the adjustment of children before and after their transition to junior high school. Results indicated that of four family types identified (based on patterns of change or stability in parental work status), children in deprived and declining families were less competent than their peers in stable or recovery families. Although most of the subjects experienced some difficulty in school adjustment, the transition was shown to be especially difficult for those whose parents were simultaneously dealing with changes in their work status.

Fourth, although the macrosystem, in many ways, is removed from the daily life of an individual, it does consist of extremely important societal influences (political, religious, economic, and other values) that clearly affect human development. Bronfenbrenner (1967) demonstrated the influence of

macrosystem values in an early comparison of peer group and adult pressures on children in the United States and the former Soviet Union. At that time, in the Soviet Union, a cohesive core of socially accepted and politically endorsed values left little room for differences in expectations between the adults or peers in one's environment. In the United States, on the other hand, there were frequently unmistakable differences between these significant people, with the result that children and adolescents often found themselves being pulled in different directions. With the breakup of the former Soviet Union, the situation that once existed in the United States (and to a large extent, still appears to) now is much more characteristic of the former Soviet Union as well.

As we close this discussion, it seems only fair to give Bronfenbrenner the last word on the challenge of operationally defining elements of his evolving bioecological model as well as efforts to scientifically measure them. As he states, "Thus far, I have accorded more attention to the conceptual rather than to the operational aspects of this challenge. I did so for a reason; namely, most of the research designs and methods of measurement currently in use in developmental science are not well-suited for what I have referred to elsewhere as 'science in the discovery mode' (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). To be more specific, these designs and methods are more appropriate for verifying already formulated hypotheses than for the far more critical and more difficult task of developing hypotheses of sufficient explanatory power and precision to warrant being subjected to empirical test. . . . In summary, most of the scientific journey still lies ahead" (Bronfenbrenner, 1999, p. 24). For those interested in reading more about these issues, see any of the several references mentioned in this discussion.

## ◆ SUMMARY

This chapter focuses on theories and methodologies used in the conduct of cross-cultural research in general and developmental research in particular. We begin with reasons for studying human development—to *understand, explain, predict, and* (in some instances) *control behavior*. To successfully achieve these goals, we need to use theories or *sets of hypotheses or assumptions about behavior*. We discuss, in detail, six approaches that will receive significant attention—Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, Super and Harkness's developmental niche concept, Piaget's theory of cognitive development, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of development, Erikson's psychosocial theory, and Kohlberg's theory of moral development. We discuss some of the ways in which cross-cultural methods might be classified; distinguish between different types of cross-cultural researchers (natives and sojourners); and comment on specific techniques, including ethnographies, cross-cultural comparisons, and hologic studies. We conclude with a discussion of methods for assessing components of the developmental niche as well as ecological systems.

### ◆ STUDY QUESTIONS

- Explain the purpose of theories in the study of human development.
- Describe and discuss Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development.
- Describe Harkness and Super's developmental niche model.
- Compare and contrast the human development theories of Piaget and Vygotsky.

### ◆ FURTHER READINGS

- Urie Bronfenbrenner. (2005). *Making Human Beings Human: Bioecological Perspectives on Human Development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- The culminating work by the author, consisting of twenty-three articles written over six decades that describe the historical development of his groundbreaking model. Contains recommendations for future research and applications for the design of social programs and policies for promoting positive development of children and families throughout the world.
- Douglas Raybeck. (1996). *Mad Dogs, Englishmen, and the Errant Anthropologist: Fieldwork in Malaysia*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.
- A lively account of the author's adventures and misadventures while doing fieldwork, with vivid descriptions of Kelantanese society and culture, kinship, linguistics, and gender relations. Provides a real sense of how an anthropologist conducts and gathers reliable information in cultural settings where often "things go awry."
- Susan Goldstein. (2000). *Cross-Cultural Explorations: Activities in Culture and Psychology*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- This book contains nine chapters with ten activities each revolving around case studies, self-administered scales, mini-experiments, and a collection of content-analytic, observational, and interview data allowing "hands-on" experience. Of particular interest is a chapter on "Culture and Psychological Research" that explores major issues and techniques in the conduct of cross-cultural research.
- Walter J. Lonner & Roy Malpass. (1994). *Psychology and Culture*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Each of the forty-three short (five- to six-page) easy-to-read chapters on various aspects of cross-cultural psychology provides personal insights into the ways in which the authors carried out their research, often with revealing comments on the mistakes they made.
- F. J. R. van de Vijver. (2000). Types of cross-cultural studies in cross-cultural psychology. In W. J. Lonner, D. L. Dinnel, S. A. Hayes, & D. N. Sattler (Eds.), *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture* (Unit 2, Chapter 6), (<http://www.wvu.edu/~culture>), Center for Cross-Cultural Research, Western Washington University, Bellingham, Washington.
- This easily accessible online article classifies cross-cultural studies along three dimensions and provides examples and illustrations of cross-cultural methodology.

## ◆ DEVELOPMENTAL ANALYSIS

### INTRODUCTION

Here you will have the opportunity to explore your own development. By finding ways to apply important concepts to your own life, you will not only better understand them but will also become more aware of whom you are and the various influences (cultural, familial, biological, and social) that have contributed to your unique development.

One difficulty with organizing the large amount of material in a book is that most research is not collected in a longitudinal manner. There are seven areas of focus: socialization, family, language and cognition, self and personality, social behavior, issues of gender and sexuality and health. When you explore each of these, we recommend you take time to examine how each area has contributed to your development and, in many cases, continues to play a role. Try to relate the many concepts to your own life by jotting down brief examples from your experiences.

To help you in this self-exploratory effort, you will find in the chapter a developmental box presenting the fictionalized life of “Maddi” Skelton. Her life will be described in the first person from infancy through the later adult years.

These developmental boxes will serve as examples of how you might reflect on your own life. Consider describing your culture and the ecological system and developmental niche in which you grew up. Subdivide your notes into sections labeled Infancy, Childhood, Adolescence, and Adulthood. Within each section, describe your development in terms of culturally influenced behaviors, such as sleep, feeding patterns, food preferences, attitudes toward caretakers (parents, teachers, siblings), early learning (formal and informal), rites of passage characteristic of your culture, family relations, and any other important aspects of the socialization process that had an effect on the person you are today. Be sure to use concrete examples from your own life. In this manner not only will you understand these concepts better, you will also have authored your own autobiography—something you will likely treasure and add on to as you make your way through additional life stages.

Enjoy!



# CULTURE AND SOCIALIZATION

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## CULTURE AND SOCIALIZATION

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*Kamuzu Mathebula is fourteen years old and lives in Diepkloof, a section of Soweto, an all-black township outside Johannesburg, South Africa. He lives with his mother, aged grandmother, two brothers, and a sister in a shack made of discarded plastic sheeting and wood with a corrugated iron roof. There is no electricity or running water. Diarrhea and tuberculosis are common here. His mother, a widow, works as a maid for the Martins, an Afrikaner (white South African) family, five miles away. Kamuzu has attended poorly funded segregated schools most of his life. With the end of apartheid (the white-government-enforced system of “separateness”) in 1990, his future has been looking better. Rather than working long hours for meager wages in one of the local textile factories, Kamuzu hopes to attend the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg and become a doctor and help his people.*



*Hendrik and Patricia Martin, the Dutch-descended Afrikaner family that Kamuzu’s mother works for, have a son named Jeremy who is also fourteen years old. He and his younger sister, Yvonne, live in a wealthy neighborhood of large, well-kept homes. Jeremy’s father is president of an import–export company, started by his grandfather, and his mother teaches science at the exclusive private school he and his sister attend. His goal, like Kamuzu’s, is to attend the university in Johannesburg and study medicine.*



Two young South African boys—the same age, residing just a few miles apart near the tip of the African continent—supposedly live in the same society but have been raised in clearly different environments (developmental niches) by very different families; yet they share a common desire of becoming doctors.



How can we account for the similarities and differences in the development of these two young adolescents? While it is true that Kamuzu and Jeremy share a number of characteristics, in large measure they are a reflection of two distinct cultures—different social contexts, parental belief systems, societal values, and cultural perspectives. Every one of us, like each of them, is influenced by a unique combination of factors, including the genetic material inherited from our ancestors, the family in which we are raised and the style of parenting to which we are exposed, the friends we make and the schools we attend, the historical period in which we are born, and (of pivotal importance) the culture and ecological contexts in which we live out our lives. As Sigel and colleagues (1992) have noted, “Since it is a culture which serves to define values, beliefs, and actions of families, it is imperative and in fact a virtual necessity for the applied developmental psychologist to develop a knowledge base of cultures” (Roopnarine and Carter, 1992b, p. ix.).

Indeed, while this is essential, knowledge of cultures is not enough. To genuinely understand and explain cultural differences in development, we first need to look at the way in which a culture defines these values, beliefs, and actions, and this requires an understanding of the crucial process of socialization.

## ◆ ECOLOGICAL CONTEXT

As pointed out earlier, our ecological approach looks at human development in terms of the individual within a number of changing environments where growth and development occur as a result of relationships between and among the individual and others surrounding him or her. A child is first studied in the context of the family followed by the community and then the expanded culture. We begin by considering the concept of socialization and its influence on various behaviors across the lifespan and across cultures.

### What Is Socialization?

Like many concepts in developmental psychology, socialization can be variously defined. For our purposes, we will view **socialization** as *the process by which an individual becomes a member of a particular culture and takes on its values, beliefs, and other behaviors in order to function within it*. It is through the process of socialization that society teaches desirable behavior while inhibiting undesirable behavior, prepares individuals to become successfully functioning members in its principal institutional settings (family, school, community, and workplace), and guarantees that important traditions (although sometimes modified) will be passed to future members of the culture.

It is far from easy to describe or explain cultural socialization. Contemporary theories focus on the thousands of interactive exchanges between a child and family members over a long period of time during which each is influencing the behavior of the other, making it difficult to assess cause and effect. In addition, explanations have become more complex and multidimensional than those offered by earlier approaches (Grusec & Hastings, 2008).

Edwards (1996) has noted that socialization theories have also undergone substantial revision. For far too long, theories and their proponents were ethnocentric (e.g., proposing that explanations of behavior in one society applied equally well in others). Such theories relied heavily on research and assumptions based in Western societies, with the result that theories were either nongeneralizable to other cultures or failed to take into account the richness of human diversity. In a sense, theorists were victims of their own socialization and were promoting a Westernized view of the world that they frequently imposed on the cultures they were studying, rather than letting indigenous behaviors emerge and be recognized. As evidence, Edwards (1989) cites some of her own earlier work in which Mayan children in Zinacantan, Mexico, learned toilet training and other self-care skills by means of imitation and thereby made a relatively easy transition from infancy to early childhood, compared with other cultures in which these activities are characterized by resistance and great difficulty. There would appear to be an entirely different cultural context operating in this Mayan culture than what we tend to see in North America and some cultures of Western Europe. Values important to the successful functioning of these Mayan children are being transmitted in a way that provides a foundation for the development of infants and toddlers, who closely observe and carefully imitate and respond to their elders and others, rather than expecting others to respond to them. A researcher who has made significant contributions to our understanding of socialization, particularly in the area of cognition, is Barbara Rogoff (2003). Rogoff's approach to this topic has been greatly influenced by the work of the Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky. Rogoff developed the concept of *guided participation* to expand on Vygotsky's concept of the *zone of proximal development* "in order to draw attention to the opportunity to learn through participation in nonverbal and tacit forms of interaction as well as through societal arrangements, not just from instruction or scaffolding" (personal communication, 2004). Guided participation emphasizes the bidirectional, or two-way, nature of socialization and the fact that children are active participants in their own socialization. In describing this concept, Brislin (1993) provides an example familiar to those who have lived in or conducted research in many of the countries in South and Southeast

Asia—namely, the cultural requirement that children learn that the right (clean) hand is for eating and the left (unclean) hand is to be used for personal hygiene. If children do not learn this behavior through participation in daily home activities, parents, other adults, or even older siblings will guide the children in the appropriate way. For example, while eating, one of these “teachers” might be seen inhibiting use of the left hand while gently guiding the right toward the food. The point, Brislin says, is “that the children’s behavior directs the teacher’s behavior. If children learn through simple observation, there is no need for the more active intervention of holding down and guiding hands” (p. 130). Contrast this more directive approach with the observational approach of Mayan child training cited above.

Let us now consider how the socialization process relates to two of our major themes: the ecological model and the developmental niche.

### **Ecological Model and the Developmental Niche**

As we have already noted, socialization is a lifelong process, occurring within a variety of environments or social contexts in which we live, influencing the activities in which we participate, and significantly contributing to our development across the lifespan.

There are two important themes that are interwoven: Bronfenbrenner’s **ecological model** and the concept of the **developmental niche**. The ecological model allows us to look at human development as it occurs in its real-world settings or ecological context and is composed of five categories of interrelated systems. It is within these interconnected contexts that socialization takes place and in which we begin to see the development of “lives across cultures.”

The socialization process and the interaction between an individual and her or his environment in its various contexts (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem) are at the center of the ecological model. For example, if one were interested in comparing and contrasting the self-concepts of adolescents in Israel and Palestine, it would be critical to consider their socialization experiences within their culture, home, school, and among peers as well as their exposure to the media, childrearing practices, parental attitudes and values, and other important influences. In this regard, take a moment and think of your own self-concept. What were some of the socialization experiences that influenced you? Was one more important than another? In what ways?

Likewise, socialization plays a major role in the three interrelated components of Super and Harkness’ developmental niche. An interesting example is a study by McDade and Worthman (2004) focusing on “socialization ambiguity.” The authors noted that nontraditional lifestyles, such as globalization,

were presenting young people in the islands of Samoa with new socialization opportunities along with possibilities of “stress-inducing dissonance” (conflicts resulting from incompatible beliefs and attitudes held simultaneously). Their findings revealed socialization ambiguity to be a significant source of stress on two different islands although the direction varied, possibly an indication of dissimilar socialization objectives on each island. Can you think of any event or situation in your life when you experienced “socialization ambiguity”? Do you recall how it was resolved?

The various aspects of the ecological model and the developmental niche are illustrated in Box 1, which describes some of the ways in which

### BOX 1



#### BECOMING JAPANESE: AN ECOLOGICAL VIEW OF SOCIALIZATION

In her insightful book on Japanese culture, Joy Hendry (1986) provides a delightful picture of the organization and function of three of the most important microsystems of early childhood development: family, neighborhood, and preschool. Using everyday examples, she shows how these contexts are connected with some of the most important cultural values found in the mesosystem, which, in turn, have significant effects on the surrounding exosystem. In addition, Hendry discusses the strong emphasis the culture places on cooperative behavior; academic achievement; indulgent attitudes toward infants; and the hierarchical nature of parent–child, sibling, and neighbor–child relationships. These fall within the setting of the macrosystem and deepen our understanding of how, accompanied by a traditional respect for age and seniority, these behaviors effectively combine to produce characteristics that are uniquely Japanese.

Hendry describes the family microsystem and the influence of those within it in this way: “The child . . . is in close contact with one set of grandparents and possibly one or two sets of great-grandparents, as well as its parents. . . . Other close relatives are likely to be frequent visitors . . . [and] may well play quite an important part in their early rearing” (p. 36). However, unlike recent developments in Western societies, Japanese fathers tend to play a relatively minor role in early childrearing because “many men [return] . . . home each evening after the children are asleep, and [leave] . . . in the morning before they get up” (p. 38).

According to Hendry, relationships within the neighborhood microsystem are much more institutionalized than in many other countries. For example, “Informal aid is usually given between houses popularly delineated as ‘the three opposite and one on either side’ (*mukosangen ryodonari*). . . . In this

**BOX 1** CONTINUED

context, mothers of young children meet at the local swings, discuss problems with each other, and occasionally look after each other's children" (pp. 40–41). These neighbors are frequently the first people outside the family with whom the children interact and from which they acquire their first friends. When they enter school, children are organized into a children's group (*kodomogumi*) based on neighborhoods, which arrange "sporting activities, outings and school disciplinary groups [and] . . . gather at a meeting point every morning in order to walk to school together. Thus, the relations established informally at an early age are likely to continue, and even for children whose families move, there are similar groups for them to join in other areas" (p. 42).

The third microsystem, that of the kindergarten or day nursery, is also a highly structured setting in which children are separated according to age "so that most of their contact with other children will be with peers, great emphasis being placed on the ideal that all children should be friends (*tomodachi*) and get on well with one another. . . . Conflict and competition is discouraged [and] . . . every child has a turn eventually to serve and to discipline the others" (p. 43). Later, "after-school classes in English and music provide excellent opportunities for kindergarten classmates to maintain their friendships throughout their school lives" (p. 45).

This short excerpt provides only a glimpse into the complex but inter-related ecological world of Japanese children and their families; we highly recommend that the reader look at Hendry's book for a fuller picture.

*Source:* Adapted from "Becoming Japanese: The Arenas and Agents of Socialization" by J. Hendry (1993) in R. W. Wozniak (Ed.), *Worlds of Childhood Reader* (pp. 34–47), New York: HarperCollins.

Japanese children become socialized into their culture. To further illustrate this point, we provide three brief examples that will receive detailed attention later. First, if a child is doing poorly in school, this can have an impact on behavior within the family and affect the parent–child relationship in a variety of ways (e.g., neglect or abuse). A home situation involving neglect or abuse can have effects on a child's relationships with parents, peers, teachers, and other family members. In addition, a child's temperament within a particular cultural context (e.g., Brazil or Japan) may affect the way parents interact with that child and, in turn, influence the development of personality and self-concept. Finally, a sick, fussy, or light-sleeping child may keep parents awake at night, making them less effective at work or in their relationship with each other. (Variations in sleep patterns and their relationship to the approaches mentioned above are discussed in the next section.)

With (hopefully) a clear understanding of the ecological model, the developmental niche, and the cross-cultural theme, we are now prepared to look at some cultural variations in socialized behavior.

### **Some Cultural Variations in the Socialization of Behavior**

In this text with its major focus on cultural similarities and differences, it is impossible to provide as comprehensive a view of human development as do more traditional developmental books. For a general overview of human development principles, we direct the reader to one of these books. Our goal is to consider selected topics for which a large or growing body of cross-cultural research evidence exists and discuss these topics chronologically—from the early beginnings of infancy through the later years of adulthood. Another aspect, unique to this discussion, is the incorporation (and suggested modification) of Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory of development in an effort to place these behaviors within a cross-cultural perspective.

We begin our discussion of selected topics with a consideration of some of the principal behaviors socialized by most parents across cultures. We turn first to socialization during pregnancy, prenatal development, and birth.

### **Pregnancy, Prenatal Development, and Birth**

Joining a birth preparation class or exercise class during the early stages of pregnancy provides women with opportunities to interact with other mothers or soon-to-be mothers and become socialized into one of the most important experiences of their lives. They must be objective and extremely careful in assessing the information they receive because no two mothers have the same experience and theirs may be quite different from other mothers. However, especially for young first-time mothers, the experience may prove to be very beneficial.

In a recent article, Karen Smith (2005), a language education professor, explored her use of "prebirth gender talk" for the initiation of gender socialization of her baby in the womb following a sex-identifying ultrasound. Findings showed that, in this particular case, gender socialization began in utero, and the labeling of the fetus predetermined the personality for her and also, knowing it was a male, allowed her tone of voice to become "sharper" and "stronger." Presented as a "case study in narrative," Smith documented the words spoken and feelings expressed to her second child beginning in the second trimester, in utero, in an effort to document engendered language and socialization. She concluded that knowledge of the baby's sex imposed social mores upon her "interaction" with it, and she began nurturing specific male traits and stereotypes. To learn more and read a transcript of this mother's "prebirth talk," go to [http://www.redorbit.com/news/display?id=158908&source=r\\_health](http://www.redorbit.com/news/display?id=158908&source=r_health).

In terms of actual childbirth, women are likely to experience differences in length and difficulty of labor. Yet in the United States there is often a socialization of birth procedures applied to large numbers of mothers-to-be during delivery: placed on their backs, attached to a fetal monitor and IV for delivery of medicine, injection of pain relieving drugs, and administration of an episiotomy to widen the birth area. In some cultures, women hold on to a rope, lie in a hammock, relax in a pool or Jacuzzi, or even squat or kneel on the floor. Doctors and nurses are frequently replaced by midwives, female relatives, family, and friends.

## ◆ INFANCY

When a newborn arrives in the world, independent of its particular culture, it has many basic needs that require immediate attention. How these needs are met and the manner in which infants are socialized varies considerably across cultures and often among ethnic groups *within* a single society. In fact, there is often more variability in certain behaviors within cultures than between or among cultures.

It is clear that culture influences patterns of parenting from the first hours of infancy (e.g., when and how parents care for infants, the extent to which they allow them to explore their surroundings, how nurturant or restrictive they might be, and which behaviors they value and socialize). Bornstein expressed it succinctly when he says, “With the birth of a baby, a parent’s life is forever altered. Those changes, in turn, shape the experiences of the infant and, with time, the person he or she becomes. Linked, parent and child chart that course together. Infancy is a starting point of life for both infant *and* parent” (2002, p. 33).

There is a wide variety of skills and abilities that are influenced by socialization in this early period—physical (sitting, crawling, walking, grasping), cognitive (language), social (emotional expression, attachment, temperament), and more. At this point, let us look at three of the most basic behaviors parents need to socialize.

### Sleep

While all babies require sleep, psychological, anthropological, and even pediatric literature reveals considerable variation in cultural sleeping arrangements (McKenna, 2002). According to Harkness and Super (1995), the way sleep is organized, including where and with whom, is an intriguing aspect of culture because, although it is a private rather than public behavior, it is highly structured by different societies and tends to be relatively resistant to change. As these researchers point out, “Parents play a primary role in the assignment of settings and routines for sleep, thus perpetuating a cycle of

#### CULTURE AND SOCIALIZATION

culture transmission within the privileged context of the family" (p. 227). For example, in a study of Kipsigis farming families in the highlands of rural Kenya in East Africa, Harkness and Super noted that although the next-to-youngest child continues to sleep with its mother and other siblings after the birth of a younger child, it no longer sleeps at the mother's front but rather at her back. This change, along with the termination of breast-feeding and back-carrying, results in a "fundamental shift in the child's physical and social settings of life" (1995, p. 227).

Sleep management is one of the earliest culturally determined parent-child interactions and may provide a useful framework for interpreting cross-cultural differences in the varying emphases placed on such behaviors as autonomy and dependence. Others have made a similar argument with regard to the development of interdependence and sensitivity to the needs of other people.

In a somewhat related effort, aimed at studying development as adaptation, Chisholm (1983) conducted an extensive investigation among Navajo Indians in North America of their use of the cradleboard (a small wooden



*Native American children strapped to cradleboards during their first year walk at about the same time as other children (Edward S. Curtis/Corbis)*



frame to which an infant is strapped) to determine whether it might cause disruption in mother–infant interaction. (See photo of a Hopi Indian cradleboard below.) The Navajo cradleboard, or literally “baby diaper,” has several purposes, such as infant transport, baby-sitting device, and regulator of infant states including level of physiological responsiveness or arousal and sleep. According to Chisholm, a child is asleep most (as much as 85%) of the time he or she is on the cradleboard, but the numbers of hours on the board may vary from only a few to as many as twenty-three, with fifteen to eighteen being normal. Chisholm concludes that cradleboard use seems to have no lasting effect on a child’s behavioral development, and any observed group differences between Navajo and Anglo children are likely a result of sociocultural differences within the infant’s environment—what we would attribute to the child’s ecological settings and the developmental niche.

While it is a common practice among middle-class families in the United States and Canada to put young infants in their own room to sleep (in part, to give them an early start down the road to independence), many Mayan mothers (American Indian peoples of Mexico and Central America) view this custom as equivalent to child neglect. On the other hand, interdependence—a prominent personality and cultural characteristic among Japanese—can be attributable, at least in some measure, to the fact that Japanese children (sometimes due to an overcrowded microsystem) frequently sleep with their parents until the age of six or even, in some cases, to the beginning of puberty, when independent sleeping marks a culturally recognized change in one’s developmental niche. Similar findings have been found in China, where “all-night co-sleeping” during infancy and early childhood is the norm, decreasing in prevalence with increasing age, and unusual after puberty (Liu et al., 2005). In urban China, the prevalence of regular bed sharing has been found to be 18.2 percent and as high as 55.8 percent in seven-year-olds (Liu et al., 2003), and in Korea 73.5 percent of mothers approve of bed sharing between three and six years of age (Yang & Hahn, 2002).

The parent–child relationship and its effect on the development of dependence, independence, or interdependence can also be viewed within the framework of Erikson’s psychosocial theory. According to Erikson’s model, which, as we have cautioned, tends to present a predominantly Westernized perspective, social maturation during the first year of infancy is reflected in the development of a feeling of *trust versus mistrust* (e.g., the world is good and comfortable—trust—or threatening and uncomfortable—mistrust). Whichever view develops will depend largely on the parent–infant relationship. For example, many infants learn to trust that if they cry because they are hungry, someone will pick them up and feed them. Parents, on the other hand, learn to trust that their infants will be quieted and comforted when they are fed because the pattern of interaction is consistent.

Similar patterns develop near the end of infancy (during the second and third year) with regard to the second crisis of *autonomy versus shame and doubt*. For example, either children will begin to explore their surroundings

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*Japanese children often sleep with their parents for the first several years.*

(© Inmagine / Alamy)

on their own (sometimes getting into trouble) and decide for themselves what they want to wear, eat, or do, or they will obediently follow the demands of parents and develop doubts about their abilities and feel incapable of making decisions and governing their own behavior.

If we look at trust and independence, as illustrated in the Kipsigis and Japanese examples mentioned earlier, the Western bias inherent in Erikson's theory becomes obvious. In these cultural contexts, social maturation is not associated with increased independence but rather with increased interdependence within the family. In both cultures, infants first develop trust and attachment as a result of sleeping with parents. Some degree of autonomy in Kipsigi infants is achieved when breastfeeding ends, and the older child is moved from the mother's front to her back to accommodate the arrival of a new baby. In the Japanese culture, in which a mother sleeps with the child for an even longer period, interdependence would appear to be even stronger than in Kipsigi society. Consideration of these examples strongly suggests that we may need to make adaptations in Erikson's theory when attempting to apply it in another cultural context.

The practice of **co-sleeping** (*a child sleeping with the parent*) is, in fact, routine in most of the world's cultures, and was the practice in the United States until shortly after the beginning of the twentieth century. Studies have suggested that the United States and other parts of North America are nearly alone in their expectation that children sleep in their own beds, in their own rooms, apart from their parents (McKenna, 2002). The well-known pediatrician Benjamin Spock, to whom generations of American parents have turned for advice on raising



*Western infants often begin to develop independence by sleeping alone in their cribs.*

(Courtesy of authors)

their children, stated that “it’s a sensible rule not to take a child into the parents’ bed for any reason” (Spock & Rothenberg, 1992, p. 213). Super and Harkness (1982), on the other hand, have suggested that the expectation that infants will be able to sleep through the night without some contact or involvement with parents may be “pushing the limits of infants’ adaptability” (p. 52). In a study of children in India, aged three to ten years, it was reported that 93 percent of them were co-sleeping (Bharti, Malhi, & Kashyap, 2006). Again, we see the importance of cultural as well as individual and familial differences in the determination of a particular behavior such as sleep patterns. Where did you sleep when you were an infant—in your parents’ bed, in a nearby crib, or in a separate room? If you are married and have children of your own, where do they sleep?

When considering sleep practices among parents in different cultures, it may not be the specific practice itself but rather the cultural context and values that are the most important consideration. This view supports the ecological and developmental niche themes and leads us to another basic infant need requiring socialization—feeding.

### ***Feeding***

When infants are not sleeping, much of their time is spent eating. Just ask any new parent! How, what, and when to feed a child is another socialized behavior heavily influenced by the developmental niche, social context, parental beliefs, and values of one’s culture.

Children need adequate nutrition, before birth as well as during infancy, if they are to grow properly and develop into healthy children and adults. The

first two to three years are critical for physical development of the brain. The effects of nutritional deficiencies in infancy can be carried into adulthood and even affect another generation in terms of a mother's poor diet, inability to carry a baby to full term, or delivery of a low-birth-weight infant. According to figures gathered by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and released in *The State of the World's Children 2009* report, more than 150 million children in developing countries under the age of five are malnourished. This malnutrition contributes to more than half of the nearly 12 million under-five deaths occurring in developing countries each year. This number reflects both good and bad news in the fight against malnutrition. On the positive side, there are fewer malnourished children than a decade ago. However, progress varies significantly among cultural regions. For example, in Latin America and the Caribbean, percentages have declined and are under 10 percent while numbers have actually increased in Africa.

Malnutrition can have an impact on an individual's resistance to disease, as well as normal development of intellectual or cognitive abilities. In fact, Pollitt, Gorman, Engle, Martorell, and Rivera (1993), in a study conducted in Guatemala, report finding a link between inadequate nutrition in infancy and cognitive functioning in adolescence, notably among those living in poor socioeconomic circumstances. In a study among low-income Nicaraguan mothers, findings revealed a clear relationship between maternal beliefs about infant feeding and a child's nutritional level during the first year (Engle, Zeitlin, Medrano, & Garcia, 1996). The authors conclude their study by stating that "behavioral encouragement to eat as observed here did not reflect the sense of responsibility of the mother about feeding [and that] . . . further work is needed to determine the ways in which mothers translate their belief in helping children to eat into feeding behaviors" (p. 443). On the positive side, UNICEF reported that more than 300,000 children were saved from malnutrition in Niger in 2005, but that long-term programs were needed to address the issue.

For a long time, mothers around the world have been told that breastfeeding is the ideal method for providing nourishment to babies. The reasons most frequently mentioned include the fact that breast milk is more easily digested than other types of milk (e.g., milk from goats or cows), it protects against disease by providing natural immunization, and it is (obviously) immediately available. In most non-Western cultures, it is the method most preferred by mothers and strongly encouraged by WABA (World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action), a global network that sponsors World Breastfeeding Week each year and has a Web site containing a large number of resources (<http://www.waba.org.my>).

It should be noted that recent findings suggest that long-term breastfeeding may have additional benefits for the mother as well (e.g., significantly reducing the risk of developing type 2 diabetes). Using data from two Nurses' Health Studies of more than 150,000 women who had given birth, Steube and her colleagues (2005) found a 15 percent decrease in risk for each year of breastfeeding in the first study and 14 percent decrease in the second.

Although not able to explain precisely how breastfeeding may help to protect mothers against diabetes, they suggest it improves insulin sensitivity and glucose tolerance and may help maintain blood sugar balance.

As you might expect, cultural attitudes play a significant role in whether babies are breastfed or bottlefed (Baumslag & Michaels, 2008). Some cultures, many of them in the West, tend to make a woman feel embarrassed about engaging in this natural function in public. When mothers return to work shortly after their child's birth, as many tend to do in North American and European countries, they may be unable to continue breastfeeding. On the other hand, if bottlefeeding is the method of choice, more fathers are able to participate in feeding and bonding with their infants. The United Nations estimates that improved breastfeeding practices could save the lives of almost 1.5 million children a year. Unfortunately, few of the 129 million infants born each year receive optimal breastfeeding (e.g., breast milk with no other foods or liquids for the first six months of life, followed by breast milk and solid or semisolid foods from about six months of age on, and continued breastfeeding for up to at least two years of age along with complementary foods), and some babies are not breastfed at all (UNICEF, 2001). In fact, in 2005, UNICEF stressed that the world had a major opportunity to reduce the toll of HIV/AIDS on infants by supporting exclusive breastfeeding.

At this point, we would like to emphasize that research findings have not yet clearly demonstrated that one method has long-term benefits over the other. If both options are equally available, we would support the opinion of most experts and recommend breastfeeding for the reasons mentioned above. However, we stress that the method is not as important as what happens during the feeding process. The feeding situation provides an excellent opportunity, through socialization, for parents to establish an emotional connection with their infant (attachment or bonding) that has been shown to have important implications for interpersonal relationships throughout the remainder of the lifespan. (For an excellent overview of this topic, see Virginia Colin's 1996 book.)

As one moves through the lifespan, these early cultural experiences with food strongly influence what, when, and how much an individual will eat. For example, which would you rather eat right now—a hamburger with French fries, a bowl of rice with spicy flavored beef, snake on crackers, octopus, grasshoppers, or (perhaps)—after hearing these choices—nothing? Depending on your cultural training, the mention of any one of these meals might make you hungry or completely suppress your desire to eat. While hunger and the feeding process begin biologically, they are individually socialized by cognition, learning, and experiential factors deeply rooted in the culture and often within the immediate family. As with other behaviors, eating preferences may show greater variability within families or within cultural subgroups than they do across cultures. For an interesting ethnographic perspective on cultural food practices in an increasingly globalized world, see Watson and Caldwell (2005).

## Crying

All babies cry. But what does their crying mean, and is it responded to in the same or similar way in all cultures? Crying is the newborn's earliest form of communication with those in its immediate surroundings—the world of the micro- and mesosystems. Through crying, a baby lets others know that it is hungry, is not feeling well, has a wet diaper, wants attention, would like its older brother to stop annoying it, or conveys other information about its condition. In a sense, when newborns and infants cry, they are bringing their parents and others into their world and socializing them into understanding what their feelings are when they have no other way of expressing them. Although most parents in diverse cultures around the world can clearly differentiate these cries and distinguish one from another, it is almost impossible to teach this skill to others; experience seems to be the best teacher.

In addition, studies have shown that infants with various disorders (cystic fibrosis, Down syndrome, and others) cry differently than normal babies, and that individuals across cultures can recognize and differentiate among these various cries (Barr, Hopkins, & Green, 2000). Studies have also shown that mothers can discriminate different types of crying in low-birth-weight premature and full-term infants (Worchel & Allen, 1997), that cry analysis can successfully detect effects of prenatal alcohol exposure in newborn infants who do not show clinical signs of abnormality (Zeskind, Platzman, Coles, & Schuetze, 1996), and that crying among hearing-impaired infants differs from those with normal hearing abilities due to the lack of auditory feedback (Moeller & Schoenweiler, 1999). In an important development, Green, Irwin, and Gustafson (2000) have started to synthesize findings from several approaches into a framework that one day could be used to relate crying to early health and development. We know that fathers and other males respond in as nurturing a way to an infant's crying as do mothers and other women.

When and how often should a caregiver respond to a child's crying? If it is responded to frequently, will the child be spoiled? If crying is ignored, will insecurity be the result? These are difficult questions, and not all experts agree on the answers. In general, crying should be responded to frequently, especially during the first year and will not result in spoiling but rather will greatly assist in promoting secure attachment. In terms of Erikson's theory, frequent responding to crying appears to promote attachment as well as assist in resolving the crisis of trust versus mistrust mentioned earlier.

## ◆ CHILDHOOD

When we use the term **childhood**, we are referring to *the period extending from the end of infancy, about one and a half to two years of age, to just before the beginning of adolescence, typically about the age of eleven or twelve, depending on the particular culture.*



*Some children experience difficulties and get “hung up” in the transition between childhood and adolescence.*  
(© Joe Oppedisano)

Edwards (1996), in a discussion of the parenting of toddlers, has outlined the developmental tasks she believes children are confronted with during their second and third years. These include, but are not limited to, learning to function independently or interdependently to become a functioning member of a society, developing the beginnings of a self-concept, understanding sex roles and establishing gender identity, developing a moral conscience and the handling of aggressive behavior, and taking a place in the larger family grouping.

When older children enter elementary school, they come under the influence of two very different socialization agents—teachers and peers. In the school setting, the socialization process teaches children more about themselves (their personalities, abilities, and roles) and how to develop social relationships with adults who are not their relatives (teachers) and peers (other students), as well as ways to master some of the challenges of everyday life.

For the remainder of this section, let us consider the effects of socialization on formal and informal learning, as well as academic achievement in classroom settings.

### **Formal Versus Informal Learning**

Most of the socialization experiences of children in nonindustrialized countries take place in informal settings (e.g., within the family or among peers and siblings) and are a fundamental part of one’s daily activities. **Informal**

**learning** is not characterized by a defined curriculum and is *generally picked up by means of observation and imitation*. According to Cushner (1990), “The responsibility for learning falls mainly on the learner, making it rather personal, with extended family members often playing a critical role in the act of instruction. . . . Change, discontinuity, and innovation are highly valued” (p. 100). For example, in certain African and South American tribal groups, young boys learn hunting and fishing skills as well as methods for navigating their way through jungles and rivers by observing and imitating adult males in their culture. Girls learn cooking and child care techniques, not in school, but by helping their mothers, aunts, and other women in the daily activities of family and village life. Traditions change very little in some cultures; this is the way it has been for centuries and the way it is almost certain to be long into the future. Some of these skills are also informally taught to American children—how many of you have gone hunting or fishing with one of your parents or have helped prepare meals at home? (For a taxonomy of three types of informal learning—self-directed, incidental, and socialization—see Schugurensky, 2000.)

In other countries, as well as the United States, the majority of children learn important cultural skills as part of their society’s formal education system. As Cushner (1990) points out, **formal learning** is “*set apart from the context of everyday life and is typically carried out in the institution we know as school [and is characterized by] . . . an explicit and highly structured curriculum [in which] . . . material is learned from a book that may or may not be useful at a later time*” (p. 100). For a particularly insightful discussion of the failures of formal schooling in African societies, see Serpell’s (1993) work on Zambia.

The issue of formal versus informal schooling gives us another opportunity to look at the two crises Erikson says are characteristic of the stage of childhood. These are *initiative versus guilt* and *industry versus inferiority*. To put these crises into perspective, let us consider the case of Tamiko and Alexina. Tamiko, aged ten, lives and goes to school in Akita, Japan. Like most children in her country, her success or failure depends more on her effort and character than on her innate ability. She is learning and working productively and harmoniously in mixed-ability groups similar to what she will encounter when she is an adult. Cooperation is seen as essential to the success of the group as well as the individual, and formal instruction occurs with this in mind. In this case, the developmental niche in which early learning takes place will share certain characteristics with the adult niche in which Tamiko will later live and work. The Japanese believe that parents and teachers must coordinate their efforts so that there is a high level of contact between the school and the home throughout a child’s formal schooling. For Tamiko and her parents, academic work comes before everything else and involves long hours of study. There is a Japanese expression—“Pass with four, fail with five”—referring to how many hours of sleep are needed in order to succeed.



Tamiko's education actually began prior to entering formal preschool when her mother taught her to read, write, and perform simple mathematics. She spends more hours in school each year than almost any other children anywhere else in the world. This includes her regular classes, followed by several hours in a "juku" (cram school), and finally studying and doing homework at home until the early morning hours. While the latter is not formal in the strict sense of the word, it is nevertheless very serious and regimented. Alexina, also ten years old, lives in Minnesota in the Midwestern part of the United States and is equally serious about her education. However, in her case the focus is more on independence and self-expression. She has learned that autonomy and individual achievement are valued over group collaboration. Getting ahead is a personal goal, as characterized by Alexina's ability to take the initiative to complete assignments on her own. As with Tamiko, there will be a certain consistency between the values and behaviors present in the developmental niches of childhood and adulthood. Unlike the Japanese, Americans believe that education is to be provided in the school, not in the home. This again points out the distinction between formal and informal schooling mentioned earlier. If you think about the opening chapter vignettes, Kamuzu's educational experience, while not as rich in opportunities, would be similar in many ways to that of Tamiko (e.g., more cooperative or group learning and more informal home schooling). Jeremy, like Alexina, would be expected to show greater independence, autonomy, and self-expression. Again, in the case of Jeremy and Kamuzu, we observe more variability in their individual educational experiences within the South African culture than we do between the experiences of Jeremy in his culture and Alexina in the United States.

How might we apply Erikson's model and resolution of crises to these four children? In Tamiko's case, *initiative* and *industry* are achieved only after successfully recognizing the need for others to assist in the learning process. The same is somewhat less true in Kamuzu's situation, because his school is underfunded and he had to learn more in the informal settings of his home and community. In Alexina's case, *industry* is achieved when she is able to take initiative independently and become a "self-starter." Her success in this area is reflected in her school report card, which has a category for "industriousness." In this respect, Jeremy behaves similarly to Alexina. In short, Alexina's culture and Jeremy's subculture view initiative and industry in independent terms, whereas Tamiko's culture and Kamuzu's subculture, to a lesser extent, look at these qualities in interdependent terms. Again, when applying Erikson's theory to non-Western cultures, it is of crucial importance to consider the relevance and cultural definitions of his concepts (e.g., independence and autonomy, initiative and industry). If this is not done, a researcher is liable to make serious misinterpretations of cultural behavior.

Let us close this discussion with an interesting example of informal math learning among some of Brazil's more than two-hundred thousand "Mennios de Rua" and Columbia's "Gamines" or "Chupagruesos"—street children. Many of these children survive by selling fruits and vegetables on street corners. Most of them dropped out of school by the time they were ten, before learning good math skills. Although they conduct scores of informal financial transactions each day without making a mistake, the majority of them are unable to complete a formal, written math problem requiring them to calculate change (not unlike what they do every day) without making numerous errors. Their school (ecological setting) is the street, and it is here that they have been socialized and have learned functional math skills that allow them to survive in the street culture of large Latin American cities where they live. For an interesting discussion of these different cultural practices and the advantages and disadvantages of each, see the book *Street Mathematics and School Mathematics* by Nunes, Schliemann, and Carraher (1993).

## ◆ ADOLESCENCE

We know that adolescence begins in biology, when hormones that bring about physical changes and prepare the body for sexual reproduction are released into the bloodstream. But adolescent development ends in culture, where one's status is defined by the new role played in society and the transition to adulthood begins. From an ecological or cultural contextual perspective, adolescence is seen as a developmental stage in some, but not all, cultures. According to Cole and Cole (1996), its distinctiveness as a stage depends in large measure on whether "young people reach biological maturity before they have acquired the knowledge and skills needed to ensure cultural reproduction" (p. 629). For example, in the United States and Canada, there sometimes are young adolescents (ages twelve and above) with children of their own who, without a job or educational training, are totally incapable of providing for the welfare of their children or of themselves. Contrast this with the !Kung San living in the Kalahari Desert in Botswana and parts of Namibia and South Africa. Even before reaching the years of adolescence, older children have learned through socialization to hunt animals and gather wild plants as part of their nomadic life. They, like their North American counterparts, are biologically capable of reproduction but already know their developmental niche and have the skills to economically support themselves and a family if necessary.

Adolescence provides another opportunity to dramatically illustrate how the major themes can be used to describe and explain how cultures structure and teach the kinds of activities that Cole and Cole (1996) say need to be mastered in order to "carry out the full process of human reproduction [and how these] . . . shape the psychological characteristics that one develops at the end of childhood" (p. 629). It is at this point in the lifespan

that we can again clearly observe the development of “lives across cultures.” For example, compare two fourteen-year-old girls growing up in cultures separated by both time and space. Mankushai is a member of the Masai tribe and lives on a flat grassy plain in southern Kenya. Her days are spent in her husband’s village working side by side with her mother-in-law cooking and taking care of her young daughter, Consolata. Far away, in the United States, in California, Alisa spends her days in school studying chemistry, calculus, and world history so that she will be able to attend college and prepare for a career as an economist. Each lives in a developmental niche within an ecological system, surrounded by family, peers, and teachers, learning her culture’s values, and being socialized into an adult role. But how different their lives are and how different they will continue to be as they move through the lifespan.

Before leaving this topic, let us consider the socialization process from the perspective of immigrants and how they sometimes give up many of the values and customs of their native culture and take on those of their adopted culture, and the effects this might have on their behavior. This can be seen in studies involving first- and second-generation American Chinese adolescents who were compared with Chinese adolescents from Hong Kong, others whose parents had immigrated to Australia, and to European and Anglo Australian adolescents. For example, Chiu, Feldman, and Rosenthal (1992) found that first- and second-generation Chinese American adolescents, in terms of their adolescent problems and the severity of them, were similar to nonimmigrant adolescents. On the other hand, immigration appeared to result in reduced perceptions of parental control, which was unrelated to adolescents’ views of their parents’ warmth toward them. However, across generations, Chinese American adolescents were found to place less value on the family as a “residential unit,” consistent with the values expressed by European and Anglo-Australian adolescents, yet the authors indicated that they still differed from the other groups on this particular value.

Much of an adolescent’s time is again spent in the school setting where he or she come under the influence of even more socialization agents, such as involvement in various school organizations, music activities, or sports endeavors. During this period, at least part of their development will be influenced by the presence or absence of rites of passage.

### **Rites of Passage**

In many cultures, the transition from childhood to adolescence is marked by some sort of public recognition. Called **rites of passage**, these are *ceremonies or rituals that recognize or symbolize an individual’s movement from one status to another*. These “coming-of-age” experiences vary significantly from one culture to another but, according to a study by Schlegel and Barry (1991), are found in most nonindustrialized societies where nearly 80 percent of girls and close to 70 percent of boys go through some form of initiation.

In eastern Africa, ten- to twelve-year-old boys in the Kaguru tribe are led into the bush, stripped of all clothing, and ritually circumcised while being taught the sexual practices of adulthood by male members of the community. Later, they return to their village, are celebrated at a large feast, receive new names, and are expected to become responsible adult members of their society (Beidelman, 1997). Passage for a Kaguru girl is not as complex as for boys and occurs when she experiences first menstruation and is taught the ways of womanhood by her grandmother or older women in the tribe. She is fortunate in escaping the very painful and widespread practice of female genital surgery (called “circumcision” by some and “female genital mutilation” by others) already experienced by an estimated 100 to 140 million girls and women in twenty-eight countries in Africa, India, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia, a procedure that has no health benefits and is internationally recognized as a violation of human rights (WHO, 2008). The practice is legally outlawed in only three countries—Belgium, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. For more on the prevalence and effects of these practices, see Okedu, Rembe, and Anwo (2009).

The transition from adolescence to adulthood in North America and many other Western countries is not marked by such clearly defined rituals. In fact, many would say there are no true rites of passage experienced by all members of these societies at this particular stage in the lifespan, and if there ever were, they have disappeared. Among certain ethnic groups within the larger society, there may be some commonly experienced ceremonies, such as the Bar or Bat Mitzvah for Jewish boys and girls, that may come close to being a rite of passage. On the other hand, while not experienced by all adolescents at the same time, or by many at all, the following are frequently mentioned as *possible* rites of passage in North American society: graduation from high school or college, successfully passing a driver’s test, marriage, or the first job. The lack of commonly accepted rites of passage in these societies may be attributed, in part, to a lack of conformity in developmental niches; for example, two families living next to each other may have significantly different backgrounds, cultural origins, ethnicity, values, and traditions than those found in more homogeneous societies.

Age certainly is not a very helpful marker in cultures like the United States since there are several criteria by which individuals are considered adults (e.g., age sixteen for driving, eighteen for voting, and twenty-one for drinking). American adolescents, and their counterparts in many other countries, often linger in a “cultural limbo” between the ages of twelve to the early twenties when they may (or may not) one day be considered adults.

An exception to the comments made above is the **Vision Quest**, an experience common to many of the more than 500 culturally diverse Native American tribes in North America. Performed primarily as a rite of passage for adolescent males, it begins with the taking of a boy, aged fourteen or fifteen, into a “sweat lodge,” where his body and spirit are purified

by the heat given off by burning cedar. Sitting with the boy is a medicine man who advises him and assists him with ritual prayers. Later, he is taken to an isolated location and left alone to fast for four days. He prays, contemplates the words of the medicine man, and waits for a vision that will reveal to him his path in life as a member of his tribal culture (Delaney, 1995). As another example, Navajo girls at the time of menarche take part in a rite of passage that involves morning running and the baking of a ceremonial cake.

It is clear from this discussion that different cultures treat their young people very differently. Some provide a clearly defined niche within the microsystem of the family where the parents, elders, and others initiate and prepare their young people to move into the wider realms of the mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem and to deal with the challenges and opportunities available to them as recognized adults. Other cultures, such as many Western societies, could do more to prepare their young people for the often difficult transition to adulthood.

In discussing rites of passage, it is important to keep in mind that each culture uses these as a way of helping its adolescents arrive at an understanding of their **identity**, or *self-definition as a separate individual in terms of roles, attitudes, beliefs, and values*. In the case of the Kaguru mentioned earlier, adult male identity is achieved when young boys undergo circumcision, and adult female identity is attained when young girls experience their first menstruation. Identity and adulthood are defined and achieved in terms of tribal customs and beliefs. In North American societies, identity is achieved when adolescents demonstrate some measure of independence, initiative, and industriousness although these qualities are not always clearly defined.

The differences between these cultures can be considered in terms of Erikson's fifth crisis—*identity versus role confusion*. Failure to achieve identity in these cultures results in what Erikson refers to as role confusion. The difficulty in terms of this crisis lies in how each culture defines identity and marks the onset of adulthood. In many respects, achievement of identity is less ambiguous in traditional, nonindustrialized societies because rites of passage are clearly defined and adolescents know what is expected of them in order to become an adult. Conversely, in many industrialized societies, true rites of passage (which apply to all members of a given society) do not exist; consequently, there is ambiguity in how identity is defined and achieved. The result is that many adolescents do not know who they are or how they are supposed to behave as adults.

Some theorists and researchers imply that Erikson's theory also applies to preindustrial societies. However, when used to explain such behaviors as identity versus role confusion, the theory contains Western biases (e.g., viewing successful identity achievement as rooted in autonomous judgments).

## ◆ ADULTHOOD

Developmentalists have historically devoted most of their attention to the earlier part of the lifespan, particularly the years from birth through adolescence. As a result, there is a great deal of research; many findings; and a host of theories describing, explaining, and predicting the events during the first two decades of life. A similar situation applies to cross-cultural human development: only recently have the last three quarters of the lifespan received serious attention. Even so, treatment of topics has been sparse and inconsistent (Zarit & Eggebeen, 2002). Cole and Cole (1993) explain it well: "Since psychologists are sharply divided over the relative roles of biology and culture in the process of development, it is only natural that they should be sharply divided on the question of whether development continues into adulthood and old age" (p. 656).

We know from casual observation that the experience of adulthood varies dramatically across and even within cultures and depends on a variety of factors, including age, gender, socioeconomic status, occupation, family structure, and timing of life events (e.g., marriage, parenthood, grandparenthood, and retirement).

Many psychologists have paid little attention to developmental changes, including socialization, after adolescence. For example, G. Stanley Hall, who wrote the first book on adolescence in 1904, believed that senescence (old age) began shortly after adolescence ended, generally when one reached the late thirties or early forties (Hall, 1904, 1922). Of course, he based this assumption partly on the fact that life expectancy was much shorter at that time. Jean Piaget, in his theory of cognitive development, proposed that individuals reached the final stage of formal operations during their late adolescence or early adulthood years. Only recently have attempts been made to explain cognitive changes in later adulthood, through the establishment of a stage of post-formal operations.

Two psychologists who did attribute significant developmental changes to the years of adulthood, and some of whose ideas have been subjected to cross-cultural examination, are Lev Vygotsky and Erik Erikson. Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist and one of the founders of the cultural-historical viewpoint, made some of the earliest contributions to our understanding of cognitive development within social settings, or cultures. Erikson, as we have previously noted, is one of a small number of theorists who emphasize cultural and social development across the entire lifespan, separating the years following adolescence into early, middle, and later adulthood. It is in this area that his views coincide most closely with those of the ecological, or cultural context, approach. Limited findings from anthropological, sociological, and

cross-cultural studies, particularly those looking at adolescence, tend to support his theoretical assumptions but, as we have previously emphasized, may have to be modified to explain cross-cultural differences.

During early adulthood (early twenties to mid-thirties), in cultures throughout the world, a majority of adults are dealing with the crisis of *intimacy versus isolation*. Decisions are made about establishing a close, intimate relationship with another person, or individuals go their way alone and fail to achieve an intimate relationship.

Lefrancois's comment (1996) that age ranges be used only as descriptive guidelines is relevant here in terms of the cultural example we provided in the section on adolescence. Confronting the crisis of intimacy versus isolation usually requires that the individual has achieved a sense of identity, probably is self-supporting, and is involved in a long-term and interdependent relationship. With this in mind, consider fourteen-year-old Mankushai of the Masai tribe in Kenya, East Africa, mentioned earlier. Mankushai lives in her husband's village, cooks his meals, and takes care of her daughter, Consolata. Except for her age, she would appear to be in the stage of early adulthood. What about other cultures, like those parts of India where child marriages are common? In which stage do we put these individuals? Compared with earlier stages of development, there is less cross-cultural research on this stage and the crisis contained within it. This raises additional questions and problems about applying this theory beyond Western societies. We clearly need more critical analysis of ideas and concepts, as well as additional research to extend the cross-cultural usefulness of theories such as these.

When one reaches middle adulthood (mid-thirties to mid-sixties), a new crisis appears that involves *generativity versus stagnation*. Middle-aged adults make work and career decisions, raise children, and show concern by guiding the next generation, or they become stagnant, self-absorbed, and self-centered. Some of our earlier comments regarding the role parents play in socialization would appear to be relevant here. It is through socialization within their ecological settings that individuals have the kinds of experiences that help them as adults find a balance between their self-interests and the interests of others. Unfortunately, as with some other areas, there is a lack of cross-cultural findings related to this stage crisis; the need for additional theorizing and research is clear. For the latest in contemporary thinking and research on the psychological, social, and cultural aspects of generativity in the lives of adults, see de St. Aubin, McAdams, and Kim (2003).

Finally, looking once again at socialization, it is in this period of adulthood, as individuals move into the working world, that "globalization" and a clear understanding of cross-cultural differences in business practices become increasingly important. In certain occupations and careers, employees must be socialized to operate within a global organizational culture, or they will

not be successful. In addition, some people form relationships with, and often marry, mates from different cultures. In such situations, they encounter differences in the assumptions and values in their own socialization and confront decisions about how they will socialize and raise their own children in multicultural and multiethnic contexts. For insight into the challenges and rewards of a multicultural childhood and its effects on personal identity, see the book *Third Culture Kids* by Pollock and Van Rekn (2001).

## ◆ LATE ADULthood

During the last period in the lifespan (mid-sixties and after), older adults find themselves dealing with the crisis of *integrity versus despair*. According to Erikson, when individuals reach this stage they tend to reflect on their lives. Either they find that they are generally happy and satisfied with their choices, having fulfilled many of their goals and having made their best efforts (integrity), or they find themselves filled with despair over missed opportunities or mistakes made, which leaves them unhappy and dissatisfied. Think about your aging relatives—parents, grandparents, great grandparents (if you are fortunate to have them), aunts, uncles, and others, and even talk with them. How do they view these years of late adulthood? Are they happy or unhappy? What concerns do they have?

### Cultural Views of Aging

What role does culture play in shaping the ecological setting in which we age and how we are socialized as older members of the society? We hypothesize that the outcome of the integrity vs. despair crisis of late adulthood might often be negative in some Western societies, which place great emphasis on economic and career success and in which nuclear families are the norm. In these cultures, parents or other relatives in their later years are sometimes seen as burdens to be moved from the microsystem of the family to rest homes in the mesosystem or exosystem. In societies in which young people enjoy the greatest status, the elderly are more often rejected. Contemporary North American society is currently such a society, but given rapid increases in its older population, the ecological setting will soon undergo dramatic changes. An ecological setting that focuses on youth rather than age places an older person in a developmental niche, where either they have few contributions to make or their contributions are not highly valued. In these circumstances, individuals might well feel despair and regret about the past and a real fear of aging.

Contrast this with an Asian, South American, or African culture, in which intergenerational families are the norm and older relatives are looked



after by their family or by the village community. Family members look to them as wise and knowledgeable members of the society with much to offer. Rather than attempting to push back the aging process and appear young, many look forward to aging.

People are living longer than ever before, many over the age of one hundred. In fact, several remote areas of the world have become known for having large numbers of people who live unusually long lives. In parts of China, senescence is postponed well into late adulthood, and a disciplined, highly active lifestyle is routine. Some commonly cited reasons for longevity include diet (lots of fresh vegetables, little meat and fat), mutual interdependence, family and neighborhood cohesiveness, and regular exercise. The ecological system is set up to socialize aging individuals as functional members of society well into old age. Contemporary North America, in contrast, is currently not such a society, but given rapid increases in its older population, the ecological setting might soon undergo dramatic changes. What is important to remember is that each culture has its own beliefs about growing old and what roles older people play in society.

It is interesting to note that when Erikson reached the eighth decade of his life, he reviewed his theory and suggested that increases in life expectancy might require a rethinking of his ideas, especially those related to development during adulthood (Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnik, 1986). We encourage others to begin this careful rethinking and, in the process, attempt to apply these new ideas to cross-cultural human development.

## ◆ SUMMARY

It should be clear after reading this chapter that universally accepted generalizations about the complex relationships among family, culture, and socialization are sometimes difficult. Numerous variables contribute to cultural differences, including cultural contexts, societal beliefs and values, individual views of children and their place in society, rural versus urban living, family structure, and parenting styles, to mention only a few. However, cross-cultural research on human development also shows that we are gaining a much better understanding of the significant role culture plays in socialization at all levels, from birth through the last years of the lifespan. Traditional, primarily Western, theoretical explanations of human development are, in large part, obsolete and were never very accurate when transported to other cultures in an effort to describe, explain, and predict behavior for which they were never intended.

You are reading this at a time when many societies are undergoing dramatic change in the way they and their family structures operate. In China, the “one-child policy” is having striking effects on traditional family practices; in the former Soviet Union, political and social changes are affecting

parental goals and behavior; in Sweden, children's rights have taken center stage; in the United States, high divorce and remarriage rates and large numbers of working mothers are reshaping family relationships. In countries throughout the world, we have seen major changes in the roles played by children and their parents, and yet, as Roopnarine and Carter (1992a) have pointed out, "Perceptions of children and how a culture manages to mesh those perceptions with children's own birthright and value to members of a society, its rituals, functions, and expectations, are not well understood" (p. 251). We have only started the journey toward understanding; much lies ahead of us.

### ◆ STUDY QUESTIONS

- Define the term *socialization*, and explain its importance to understanding cross-cultural human development.
- Discuss the components of the developmental niche, and give examples from your own experience.
- Explain what is meant by *rites of passage* and the role they play in adolescent identity.

### ◆ FURTHER READINGS

- Naomi Baumslag & Dia L. Michels. (2008). *Milk, Money, and Madness: The Culture and Politics of Breastfeeding*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.  
The authors convincingly present the medical, cultural, psychological, and economic benefits of breastfeeding to mothers, infants, and the general population. A fascinating, informative, and highly readable book.
- Jude Cassidy & Philip R. Shaver (Eds.). (2008). *Handbook of Attachment* (2nd ed.). New York: Guilford Press.  
Cutting-edge theory and research findings on attachment across a wide range of ages and contexts. An indispensable guide for understanding this crucial developmental process.
- Joan E. Grusec & Paul D. Hastings (Eds.). (2006). *Handbook of Socialization*. New York: Guilford Press.  
Almost all you want to know about socialization, including historical and methodological perspectives; its effects across the lifespan (within and outside the family); and relationship to gender, cognition, emotional competence, and prosocial development.
- John Loughery. (1995). *Into the Widening World: International Coming-of-Age Stories*. New York: Persea Books.

## CULTURE AND SOCIALIZATION

An edited anthology of twenty-six short stories from twenty-two countries focusing on the adolescent experience and emergence of adulthood. Visit the sun-baked alleys of Cairo, the terrifying forests of war-time Nigeria, a hidden grove in Jamaica, a turkey farm in Canada, a young woman facing an arranged marriage in Malaysia. Fascinating, insightful, and informative reading.

Dennis O'Neil. (2005). *Cultural Anthropology Tutorials*. <http://anthro.palomar.edu/tutorials/cultural.htm>.

This online Web site offers tutorials on a variety of topics related to socialization, including culture, language, social control, culture change, social and political organization, and processes of socialization.

## ◆ DEVELOPMENTAL ANALYSIS

### SOCIALIZATION

My name is Matilda Skelton, but everyone—thankfully—calls me “Maddi.” I was named for my great grandmother, who immigrated to the United States from England in 1847. I was born on September 17, 1938, in Elfville, Pennsylvania, a small farming community settled by Irish immigrants (population 1734). The town consisted of a feed and grain store, post office, small grocery store, Catholic Church, school, railroad depot, barber shop, gas station—and not much else! The person I am today was very much influenced by my early socialization experiences in Elfville and with my family. Let me explain.

In terms of my developmental niche, I lived in a rural setting, in a nuclear family, consisting of my two parents, a younger sister, and a younger brother. I spent my early years establishing relationships with members of my family and playmates. I learned to deal with feelings of dependence, independence, cooperation, and competition. My early caretakers were my parents, relatives, or other mothers in town. We didn't have a day care center or preschool when I was young—it was typical of the era for mothers to stay at home while raising their children.

As an infant, I slept in a crib in my parents' room for a couple of months and was then moved to my own room. I was breastfed for nine months. When I cried, my parents picked me up and comforted me. Like most American children, I was part of a formal school system. My siblings, friends, and I walked to a small school consisting of kindergarten through eighth grade, with most classes held together in the same room and taught by the same teacher. My parents and teachers worked together to ensure that I had a good education. I did chores on the farm and enjoyed learning about the animals. When I was fourteen, I began traveling eight miles by bus to attend high school; my

*(continued)*

ecological system was expanding. In terms of informal learning, my mother taught me to cook and take care of my siblings; my father taught me to drive a tractor and play a guitar. My parents were Catholic, although my mother took religion more seriously than my dad.

As I was entering adolescence during the 1950s, America was characterized by malt shops, Rock 'n' Roll Music, the hula hoop, and "hot" cars. Television was just arriving. At the same time, the nation was plagued by racial injustice, anti-Communist paranoia, and the fear of nuclear war. The closest event to a rite of passage for me was getting my driver's license at the age of sixteen. Like most of my friends, I struggled to establish an identity and often felt confused. After high school graduation in 1956, most of my girlfriends decided to be secretaries, teachers, or nurses.

I decided to go to college and chose an unusual major for girls at the time—business. My first contact with another culture was during my junior year, when I spent a semester in Italy. I was the first in my family to travel abroad or even outside Pennsylvania. It was a wonderful experience and really opened my eyes to the world. In 1962, I traveled to England for graduate work in economics. It was there that I met my future husband—Giorgio Carlo Conte—a student from Italy. He asked me to go out with him seven times before I finally accepted! Socialization can work in surprising (and wonderful) ways.

Giorgio and I were married on March 9, 1968, at my grandparents' home in Coudersport, Pennsylvania. We combined American and Italian traditions. We moved to Minnesota, where I was an economics professor at a wonderful liberal arts college. Giorgio worked at an international bank. Our daughter, Elizabeth Lucia, was born in 1969, and our son, Alexander Donato, was born in 1970. When they were young, we frequently traveled to Italy, so they could spend time with their grandparents and relatives.

I have many fond memories from my childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. I can recall our 1940 Chevrolet sedan; my dad serving in World War II; riding my bicycle to the grocery store; our icebox; a large Philco radio around which we would gather to listen to radio programs; visiting grandparents; and going to the movie theatre on Saturdays to see two films, two cartoons, news, and previews of coming attractions. For 25 cents you got all of this, a candy bar, and a bag of popcorn! Each of these experiences had a socializing effect on me in one way or another. I am now seventy-one years old and continue to go through socialization changes.



## THE FAMILY IN CULTURAL CONTEXT

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*The sun is just beginning to rise in Boslanti, along the Saramacca River in central Suriname, the smallest country in South America. Sindy Sowidagkijm, twenty-four, and her husband David, twenty-six, surrounded by a midwife and several female relatives, including two grandmothers, are nearing the birth of their third child. The two older children, on the other side of the small wooden house, are lulled to sleep by the rhythmic sound of light rain on the corrugated-iron roof. Suddenly, a baby's cry fills the room, and little Jacob makes his arrival known to all. Sindy, exhausted but happy, will breastfeed her newborn and take a deserved rest. David will dream of the day when his new son will join him and his uncles on the family fishing boat. The others will proudly spread the word about the newest citizen in Boslanti.*



*At Mt. Sinai Hospital, in downtown New York City, John and Ruth Hazelton have just entered the brightly lit delivery room on the eighth floor. At thirty-eight, this is Ruth's first pregnancy and it has been unusually difficult. She is lightly sedated with an intravenous needle pumping a labor-inducing drug into her arm. Two hours later, following an emergency Cesarean section performed by two doctors and two nurses, she is sleeping quietly in the recovery room, awaiting the time she will see her new son for the first time. Just down the hall, relaxing in a rocking chair in a birthing room and talking with her husband Walter, five-year-old daughter Sarah, other family members, and two close friends is Patricia Mezzanotti. In a half hour, she will give birth to a son in a quiet homelike atmosphere and begin the bonding process by immediately holding and feeding her newborn.*



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## ◆ ECOLOGICAL CONTEXT

The family is central to the ecological approach serving as the source for an individual's development as well as linking contexts and development and transmitting this from generation to generation. This approach allows us to view the many ways in which development and behavior adapt to various cultural and biological contexts. It recognizes that cultures share processes that, in many circumstances, can be considered universal. At the same time, it recognizes that some cultures display significant differences that emerge from their unique cultural contexts.

What is a family? What defines its structure? Is it nuclear—husband, wife, and children? Is it extended, including grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other relatives? Does it consist of two parents of different sexes, the same sex, a single parent of either sex, married or unmarried individuals, with children or without children? Is there one woman with multiple husbands, one husband with multiple wives, multiple men and women living together, with children or without? Can a family be any or all of these? These are issues we will consider in this chapter.

## ◆ CULTURAL VARIATIONS IN THE FAMILY LIFE CYCLE

In the words of William Kenkel (1985), *"Families have a beginning, they grow in numbers, their membership next declines, and eventually the original family exists no longer."* The individual is born, grows, enters a period of decline, and inevitably passes from the scene. The striking parallel between the life pattern of a normal individual and the history of a typical family gave rise to the concept **family life cycle** (p. 375). Although not a literal analogy, this concept provides a framework that allows us to consider the shifting attributes that affect individual behaviors and interactions within the family, community, and cultural context. As we make our way through this chapter, we will be looking at the family life cycle in terms of developmental stages and relating these to real-life examples of families living in a wide variety of ecological settings throughout the world. We begin with the selection of a mate and the process of marriage.

### Mate Selection

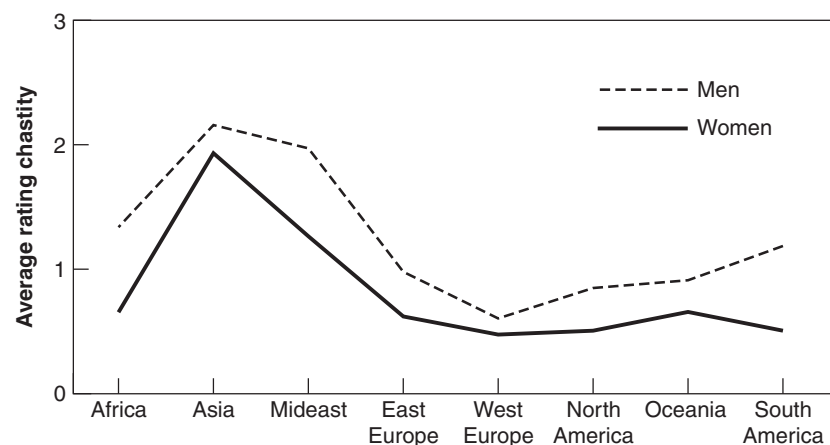
Buss (1994b) begins his study of mate preferences in thirty-seven cultures with a statement that cannot be disputed: "Every person is alive because of a successful mating. People in the past who failed to mate are not our ancestors" (p. 197). Considering how much of a person's life might be spent with a partner and the impact this relationship has on one's social, emotional, and psychological development (as well as on one's children), selection of a mate is one of our most important decisions. "How do we select a marriage partner?"

“What characteristics do we consider important?” “Are there cultural differences in selecting a mate?”

In an effort to answer these questions, Buss (with the help of fifty other researchers) conducted an extensive study of more than 10,000 individuals living in thirty-seven cultures. The approach involved asking subjects to indicate how important each of eighteen characteristics was in selecting a mate and then to rank thirteen of these in terms of their desirability. Findings revealed that, across cultures, men and women looked for mates who were kind and understanding, intelligent, had an exciting personality, and were healthy.

Buss indicated that he and his team of researchers were surprised by some of the results, particularly cultural variations concerning the most variable characteristic—chastity or the lack of previous sexual experience. It would be surprising if cultures did not vary in the value placed on chastity, since other sources on sexuality usually note cross-cultural variation in practices, values, and expectations (Hamon & Ingoldsby, 2003; Hatfield & Rapson, 2005). Such variation was indeed shown in Buss’s study. While chastity was considered irrelevant or unimportant in a prospective mate by both men and women in the Netherlands, Sweden, and Norway, it was viewed as indispensable in China and scored very highly by those from India, Taiwan, and Iran. Among those who viewed chastity as only moderately desirable were those living in Colombia, Estonia, Japan, Nigeria, Poland, South Africa, and Zambia. Yet, in an overwhelming majority of countries (two-thirds), chastity was desired in a marriage partner more by men than by women. (See Figure 1.)

Other categories showing large cultural differences in response were: “good housekeeper” (highly valued in Estonia and China, little valued in Western



**FIGURE 1** Cross-Cultural Differences in the Importance of Chastity

Source: From *Love and Sex* by E. Hatfield and R. L. Rapson; 2005. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, p. 124. Reprinted by permission.

Europe and North America); *refinement/neatness* (highly valued in Nigeria and Iran, less valued in Great Britain, Ireland, and Australia); and *religious* (highly valued in Iran, moderately valued in India, little valued in Western Europe and North America)" (Buss, 1994b, p. 199). Buss cautions that although these differences are important, there is undoubtedly much variability across individuals within these cultures. This once again reinforces our point that *there are often greater differences within cultures than between or among cultures*.

Looking more specifically at what each of the genders wanted in a mate, Buss found some interesting differences. As for women: "From the Zulu tribe in South Africa to coastal-dwelling Australians to city-dwelling Brazilians, women place a premium on good earning capacity, financial prospects, ambition, industriousness, and social status more than men—characteristics that all provide resources" (p. 199). Men were found to prefer women who are younger than they are—how much younger depends on the culture. For example, in those cultures where men often have more than one wife (e.g., Zambia and Nigeria), men prefer brides who are younger by as much as seven or eight years. In cultures where only one wife is permitted (e.g., Germany, Spain, and France), the preference was for brides only slightly younger. In all cultures, women had a preference for older men since men tend to mature later than women and also tend to have greater access to more financial resources than do younger men. Finally, "in *all* known cultures worldwide, from the inner-continental tribal societies of Africa and South America to the big cities of Madrid, London, and Paris, men place a premium on the physical appearance of a potential mate" (p. 200). According to Buss, there is a good reason for men to favor youthfulness and physical appearance, even though they may not be fully aware that "these qualities provide the best signals . . . that the woman is fertile and has good reproductive capacity" (p. 200).

Hamon and Ingoldsby (2003) also have explored the processes of mate selection in a variety of cultures, including those in North America, the Caribbean and South America, Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and Europe. With contributions from twenty authors, using a common set of guidelines and formats, it is easy for readers to make comparisons between and among more than sixteen cultures spread throughout the world. For this reason, the book appears in the Further Readings section at the close of this chapter. For a unique and comparative analysis of family trends in Asia, see Quah (2008).

Do men and women actually act on their preferences? Perhaps we'll get some answers when we look at the next topic—marriage.

## **Marriage and Other Long-Term Relationships**

Children generally benefit from a stable system of primary caretakers, commonly including, but not limited to, the biological parents. Thus, heterosexual long-term relationships are facilitated, sanctioned, and protected in most



societies. The motivation for marriage is to provide a stable environment for children. In fact, the cultural definition of “family” influences the ecological system on many levels. For example, it shapes the microsystem by ensuring (in many cases) that two parents are present, and regulates the macrosystem because it views this form of “family” as an important element of societal structure. It also affects all three components of the developmental niche in a variety of ways, such as determining family structure, presence or absence of parents and other relatives, customs of child care, parenting styles, values, belief systems, and developmental expectations. For an in-depth discussion of issues facing marriages and families today, see Schwartz and Scott (2010).

In addition to (hopefully) providing a good and healthy environment for children, individuals commit themselves to long-term relationships for other reasons. Marriage may also be a means to gain or maintain status in one’s society. In most cultures, simply the fact of being married gives married men and women a higher status than their unmarried counterparts (Kumari, 1988). Unmarried adults may be stigmatized and denied full adult status. In addition to social status, marriage may result in higher economic status. The pooling of resources of two families or a dowry paid by the family of the bride can mean considerable financial gain for both spouses. In August 2009, a thirty-nine-year-old Kenyan man offered forty goats and twenty cows to visiting Secretary of State Hillary Clinton for the hand of her daughter, Chelsea, in marriage. In response, Mrs. Clinton said her daughter was very independent “So I will convey this very kind offer.” If accepted, Chelsea would be his second wife since polygamy is legal in Kenya and his wife “ . . . has no problem with this.” Finally, and certainly not to be forgotten, individuals may be motivated to share their lives out of a desire for love and companionship.

Anthropologists have demonstrated that marriage takes many forms in cultures around the world. These include **monogamy**, in which *one man is married to one woman*; **polygyny** or **polygamy**, in which *one man is married to several women*; **polyandry**, in which *one woman is married to several men*; and **cenogamy** or **group marriage**, in which *all the women and men in a group are married simultaneously to each other*. Polygyny is found on every continent. It is common in many Islamic countries, African societies, and parts of Asia, and it is also found in North America. An abundance of wives of different ages not only represents wealth and power, but it also ensures the reproductive success of the man. A verse from the *Qur’an* helps explain the practice in Islam: “Marry women of your choice, two or three or four; but if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with them, then only one or one that your right hands possess. That will be more suitable, to prevent you from doing injustice.” (*Qur’an* 4:3). While some Muslim majority countries still retain traditional Islamic Law permitting polygyny, there are some movements within Islam that challenge its acceptability.

Polyandry is much less common. In some regions of Tibet and Nepal, brothers may share the same wife. However, in most cultures in which

polyandry is accepted, husbands do not share blood relations. In general, polyandry is associated with greater economic power of women. Men in polyandrous societies have to be more considerate of women's needs to prevent them from switching their attention to more generous and caring husbands. Thus, wives can rely on generous shares of their husbands' wealth or income and may acquire considerable wealth themselves. Only a few societies, found in some regions of Western Africa, allow both women and men to be married to multiple spouses.

A number of cultures permit sexual relations of some sort between individuals of the same sex (Cabaj & Purcell, 1998). The very few studies that address the subject in a cultural context mainly focus on homosexual relationships between men. Because such studies are limited in number, it is difficult to know with certainty what percentage of societies accept, tolerate, or even support same-sex relationships. Nonetheless, Bolton (1994) concludes from a review of anthropological studies that male homosexual relations are common in 41 to 64 percent of societies studied. By comparison, data on lesbian relationships are not as readily available, but Bolton argues that "societies, which are tolerant of homosexuality, are consistent in expressing that tolerance across age and gender categories" (p. 162).

The presence or absence of homosexual relationships in a given society once again illustrates the concept of the developmental niche, namely how certain behaviors may develop or be inhibited in response to cultural conditions. In societies that tolerate or even support relationships between people of the same sex, there are a greater number of gay and lesbian relationships. In contrast, societies that strictly prohibit homosexual relations report fewer instances of homosexuality. These differences do not occur as a result of a higher or lower percentage of gays and lesbians in the population, but as a result of differential opportunities to develop a certain preference and behavior within one's ecological surroundings and to express it as part of one's developmental niche.

There has been a slow and limited acceptance of gay and lesbian families during the early years of the twenty-first century. For example, in 2001 the Netherlands became the first society to legalize same-sex marriages, followed by Belgium in 2003, Canada and Spain in 2005, South Africa in 2006, and Norway in 2008. Other countries, while not permitting marriages, have approved same-sex civil unions. In the United States, same-sex couples can legally marry in only a small number of states.

How and why individuals are attracted to each other varies significantly across cultures. Another distinction might be referred to as the "Eastern versus Western ideal." In many Western cultures, perhaps best represented by the United States, marriage is often viewed as the culmination of romantic love. The belief is that each person has an "ideal" mate that he or she is destined to meet, fall in love with, marry, and live with "happily ever after." One of the authors (Gardiner) recalls a student telling him how her parents, living

in Yugoslavia, met and married. One day, her father climbed a hill next to his village and watched a young woman washing clothes in the river below. He returned the next day and watched her again. On the third day, he walked down to the river, told her he had been watching her for three days and had fallen in love with her and wanted to marry her. She said "yes." They were now celebrating their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary! However, there are other people who find "true love" several times and have the marriage certificates to prove it.

The "Eastern ideal" continues to characterize many of the arranged marriages in Asia, Africa, and some other parts of the world. This ideal is based on the premise that each person has several possible mates with whom they could develop a successful marriage. Frequently, India being one example, families will discuss a possible future liaison between their infant children. Sometimes, the children are aware of this arrangement; sometimes, they are not. They are expected to marry (or bring shame and embarrassment to their families); if they are lucky, they may one day fall in love with each other. A female Indian graduate student, speaking in one of the author's (Gardiner) cross-cultural courses, related that she was returning home to Bombay to get married. When asked what her future husband did, she replied, "I don't know because I've never met him." The liberated young American women in class told her that she shouldn't marry someone she didn't know. Her reply, which makes an interesting point, was that she trusted her parents to make a wise decision regarding a future husband because they knew her and him and his family. In the meantime, she could concentrate on her studies while they (the American women) would have to search for their own husbands, go through the trials and errors of dating, and hope that in the end it would all work out. In reality, arranged marriages tend to be quite stable. Do you know anyone in such a marriage? How would you react if your parents suggested such an arrangement?

Many of those who live in collectivist cultures view marriage as the coming together or blending of two families. For example, in northern Kenya, the creation of a new house is a significant part of the marriage ceremony. Once the wedding date is established, based on lunar calculations, the groom's family literally disassembles the new house, moves it to the bride's village, and rebuilds it. Prior to the wedding ceremony, the bride is taken through a rite of passage during which she is initiated into womanhood by the village's female elders and is taught what to expect from married life. Among the Mande, another African group, girls between ages twelve and eighteen attend clitoridectomy schools, where they have their clitorides removed and are formally taught how to be wives. They learn secret languages and codes that allow them to communicate with other married women. In Africa, as well as other parts of the world, wedding customs are undergoing change and reflect a mixture of the traditional as well as the modern.

## THE FAMILY IN CULTURAL CONTEXT



*Harry and Ormsin Gardiner's Thai wedding ceremony.*  
(Courtesy of authors)

The same might be said of contemporary Japan, where love marriages have increasingly replaced the earlier practice of arranged marriages. Whichever practice is followed, certain traditional customs remain. For example, a *yuinou*, or ceremonial betrothal gift (often in the form of money), is first presented by the bridegroom-to-be, through a go-between, to the bride-to-be's household. In anthropological terms, this represents the bride's price. The bride's parents are then expected to spend several times the value of the *yuinou* on a new home for the couple. Most wedding ceremonies in Japan are performed according to Shinto customs, followed by the drinking of sake (rice wine) as confirmation of the marriage and later by a celebration party.

## ◆ THE BIRTH PROCESS ACROSS CULTURES

The vignettes that opened this chapter, Sindy and David Sowidagkijm in Suriname, Patricia and Walter Mezzanotti and John and Ruth Hazelton in New York City, illustrate that, although newborns arrive every day in cultures around the world, the birth experience depends very much on cultural traditions and is deeply embedded within an ecological setting influenced by family, community, and culture.

In some societies, having a baby is just another normal event in one's life and takes little preparation. This is illustrated in the following example taken from the !Kung in the Kalahari Desert of Africa: "The first labor pains came at night and stayed . . . until dawn. That morning, everyone went gathering.

Mother and I stayed behind. We sat together for a while, then I went and played with the other children. Later, I came back and ate the nuts she had cracked for me. She got up and started to get ready. . . . We walked a short way, then she sat down by the base of a large nehn tree, leaned back against it, and little Kumsa was born" (Shostak, 1981, pp. 53–54). Similarly, in rural Thailand, pregnancy does not significantly change a woman's behavior, and she "generally carries on with her household chores until the time of birth—even, in some cases, up to the last few minutes before delivery. Rural children are usually born at home with the mother resting on a mat or mattress on the floor assisted by a non-medically trained midwife and older relatives or neighbors" (Gardiner and Gardiner, 1991, p. 183). A few hours later, the new mother is often up and participating in family activities.

In many parts of North America, including the United States, fathers-to-be are typically present during labor and encouraged to actively participate in the delivery of their child, whether it is at home or in a hospital. Not so in some parts of South America or in East Africa, where an expectant Ngoni mother is assisted by other women, while husbands and other men are completely excluded.

Clearly, not every culture approaches childbirth in the same way. In the next section, we look at the birth process in more detail and consider its variations across cultures.

### **The Ecology of Birth**

Individual feelings about pregnancy and childbirth may differ, yet the vast majority of families across the world have at least one child. How those children are conceived in today's world, with advances in medical technology, may vary widely. For example, it may be in the "the old fashioned way" through sexual intercourse when a male sperm penetrates a female ovum resulting in a zygote or fertilized egg. Conception may also occur outside a woman's body by means of in vitro fertilization, artificial insemination in which sperm from a husband, anonymous donor, or other person is injected into a woman's vagina at an appropriate time, embryo transplant, or use of a surrogate (substitute mother) who gives birth for another woman—in some cases this has been a stranger, a sister, or even a woman's own mother.

For a long time, what we knew about childbirth practices came from a Western, largely American, perspective that viewed the procedure as a medical event. Interestingly, this was not always the case. In fact, childbirth in Canada and the United States, like most other countries, was handled exclusively by women until the middle of the nineteenth century, when physicians, almost all of whom were men, began delivering babies and made it a medical rather than a social event.

In the original edition of her now classic cross-cultural investigation of childbirth in four cultures, Brigitte Jordan (1978) anticipated the approach we



(ESCUDERO Patrick/Hemis/Alamy)

take here when she noted that “we have paid little attention to the social-interactive and socio-ecological aspects of birth [which address] . . . what is biological and what is social and cultural in the process of childbirth” (Preface). In the Preface to the fourth edition of this book, Jordan and Davis-Floyd (1993) state that “an anthropology of birth must focus on the study of birthing *systems* and not the comparison of individual and isolated practices. We know that birth is everywhere a socially marked crisis event that is consensually shaped and socially patterned [consisting of] . . . practices that make sense from the inside out, though not necessarily from the outside in” (pp. xi–xii).

In a section of her book titled “The Ecology of Birth,” Jordan discusses the particular locations in which babies are born and how these reflect culture-specific patterns (or ecological settings, as we would view them) within which individuals’ lives are forever entwined. She also comments on the cultural implications of these specific arrangements.

### ***Yucatan***

Of the four cultures presented by Jordan and Davis-Floyd (1993), the Yucatan imposes the least changes in the expectant mother’s surroundings, maintaining its familiar and reassuring qualities by encouraging the Mayan woman to lie in the same hammock in which she sleeps each night “whose strengths and tautness she knows to exploit for maximum support and comfort [thereby providing] . . . the kind of security that marks the event as a normal part of family life” (p. 68).

In Yucatan, there is a clear expectation that the father-to-be will be present during labor and birth, not only to take an active role, but also in order to observe “how a woman suffers.” Frequently, if a child is stillborn, it is blamed on an absent father. In addition, the pregnant woman’s mother should be present, often in the company of others from the family microsystem, including sisters, sisters-in-law, mothers-in-law, godmothers, and sometimes neighbors and close friends. According to Jordan (1978), all of these people make a contribution to a successful birth, and the intensity of their emotional and physical involvement is “mirrored in the strain on their faces and in the signs of fatigue that become evident in them as well as in the mother” (p. 38).

Immediately following birth, it is believed that the mother and her child are susceptible to the influence of evil spirits from the bush and must remain inside the house for one week before returning to normal activity. An infant girl will have her ears pierced within the first hour after birth and sometime within the next three days will receive her first earrings, often a family heirloom. Nearly all newborns are breastfed, with nursing beginning a few minutes after birth and continuing whenever the infant appears hungry or anxious.

### ***Holland and Sweden***

In Holland, like Yucatan, women generally give birth at home, assisted by a midwife or physician, and the country continues to maintain one of the lowest infant mortality rates in the world—4.73 deaths per 1000 live births (World Factbook, 2009). In Sweden, often cited in the past as the country with the lowest infant mortality (2.75 deaths per 1000 live births), almost all babies are delivered in hospitals with the help of highly trained midwives (World Factbook, 2009). [Currently, the country with the lowest infant mortality rate is Singapore with 2.31 deaths per 1000 live births.] According to Jordan, what these two countries have in common is a program of government-sponsored prenatal care for every woman as well as availability of abortion on demand, with the result that “for all practical purposes, all pregnancies are wanted pregnancies and all babies are wanted babies” (p. 46).

### ***United States***

In the United States, ranking forty-fourth in the world in infant mortality (6.26 deaths per 1000 live births) in 2009, the majority of births (approximately 98 percent) continue to be in hospital settings under the control of medical specialists. However, unlike the three countries mentioned above, there is a wider range of options available. For example, while some families prefer to have their babies delivered at home with the assistance of a midwife, increasing numbers, like the Hazelton family in our opening vignette, are

taking advantage of birthing rooms located in hospitals, where technology is available but a home atmosphere is provided.

In this regard, an experimental project cited by Jordan is of historical (and perhaps contemporary) interest. Over a period of three years during the early 1970s, two nurse-midwives conducted the majority of normal deliveries in a California hospital. During this period, there was a dramatic drop in the number of stillbirths, fetal deaths, premature births, and neonatal deaths. When physicians once again took charge, all of these types of incidents increased, with the prematurity rate going up nearly 50 percent and neonatal mortality more than tripling (Levy, Wilkinson, & Marine, 1971). These findings suggest this topic should receive more research attention.

In the years since this 1971 experimental project, several other small-scale studies have confirmed the success rate of nurse-midwife-assisted deliveries. In 1998, MacDorman and Singh reported findings from the first large-scale study to examine the infant mortality risks for *all* single, vaginal births at thirty-five to forty-three weeks gestation delivered by nurse-midwives in the United States during the year 1991 (182,461 births or about 4.4 percent of all births that year). After controlling for a variety of social and medical risk factors, the authors compared the data for midwives with a random sample of 25 percent of physician-attended births in 1991. Results indicated that infant deaths were 19 percent lower for births attended by nurse-midwives, the risk of neonatal mortality (death during the first 28 weeks of life) was 33 percent lower, and the risk of delivering a low birth weight infant was 31 percent lower. Differences in these birth outcomes may be explained, in part, by the differences in prenatal, labor, and delivery care practices demonstrated by nurse-midwives, for example, more time spent with patients during prenatal visits, greater emphasis on counseling and education, and provision of emotional support before, during, and after delivery. Such findings lend support to Jordan's earlier contention that not only is the birth experience significantly influenced by who is allowed to be present during birth, but so is the outcome of the birth process itself. More than fifteen years before the 2009 debate over the cost of health care in the United States, it was estimated that the use of midwifery care for 75 percent of the births in the United States would produce a savings of more than \$8.5 billion per year (Madrona & Madrona, 1993).

Writing more than thirty years ago, Jordan (1978) concluded her original birth study with the following statement: "What we need to keep in mind here is that birthing systems themselves are part of a larger cultural system . . . within an economic and political structure, via the socialization of birth participants" (p. 73). This point is even more relevant today, especially in light of our recurring themes, which focus on the cultural context in which development takes place.

In a sense, if you know a society's approach to childbirth, you will understand a great deal about the values and beliefs that are at the heart of its ecocultural system, how it socializes its members, and how it conducts its interpersonal relationships.



## ◆ THE TRANSITION TO PARENTHOOD

Following the birth of a child, parents have to take on new identities—those of mother and father—perhaps the most difficult roles they will ever be required to perform. Kenkel (1985) puts the transition to parenthood in perspective when he states that “one of the significant features with regard to the parent role is a general lack of preparation for it. . . . Related to [this] . . . is the fact that the transition . . . is abrupt [and] . . . is largely irrevocable” (pp. 455–456).

Becoming a parent results in major life changes that affect not only the parents and their infant, but also many others within the ecological setting where this event occurs. For example, Heinicke (1995) writes that within a family system, “the personality characteristics of the parents as well as their relationship support systems (partner and extended family) to a significant extent define future parenting transactions with their child” (p. 277). We might ask “What about other niche influences such as the social and physical environment and customs of childcare?” These surely play an equally important role and are worthy of future research on the part of those interested in cross-cultural human development.

In this regard, Belsky hypothesizes that “supportive developmental experiences give rise to a mature healthy personality, that is then capable of providing sensitive parental care which fosters optimal child development” (1985, p. 86). This again points to the importance of the ecological setting and the transmission from one generation to another of successful parental belief systems learned within a healthy family environment. In fact, Vondra and Belsky (1993), in a later study of the developmental origins of parenting, state that “by assuming an ecological perspective . . . and by adopting a longitudinal design, research has begun to provide a more adequate test of developmental and clinical theory on the origins of parenting” (p. 25). In a volume devoted to the transition to adulthood and family relationships, Scabini, Marta, and Lanz (2006) analyze family relationships by gender and generation and offer new research questions.

## ◆ INFANCY AND CHILDHOOD

Each day throughout the world, approximately 750,000 individuals become new parents (World Factbook, 2002). Contrary to what many of these parents may think, a newborn is not always the pretty, smiling, curly-haired cherub they have imagined or seen in pictures or television commercials. Rather, a newborn is frequently an unattractive little creature—sometimes very small (or very big), often bald, toothless, hungry, and complaining—that has come to live with the new family for many years. During the first few days and weeks, most new couples wonder if they are capable of nurturing this new

person and attending to its needs. Fortunately, the majority of parents are capable and, with later additions to the family, often get even better at it.

On arrival, most **newborns** (the *term applied to babies from birth through the first two weeks*, after which the term *infant* is used) are well-equipped to deal with their new environment. For the most part, their senses work well, and they have a large repertoire of reflexes to help them adjust to the world beyond the womb. So effective are these reflexes, and so resilient are newborns, that following the devastating earthquake in Mexico City in September of 1985, babies were found alive in the ruins of one hospital nursery six days later. In Sichuan, China, following the May 2008 earthquake, a four-month-old baby girl was found in her dead mother's arms alive and still breastfeeding. More recently, in the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti, a five-year-old child survived eight days buried in the rubble of her home.

In the initial days and months following birth, parents devote much attention and concern to satisfying their child's basic needs for sleep, hunger, and elimination. As Bornstein (1995) aptly observes, "Infants forever alter the sleeping, eating, and working habits of their parents; they change who parents are and how parents define themselves. . . . Parenting an infant is a 168-hour-a-week job" (p. 3). As children get older and move into the years of early, middle, and later childhood, development keeps pace. At the center of all this activity, largely determining the nature of the parent-child relationship, are parental belief systems.

### Parental Belief Systems

In every culture, parents tend to develop shared ideas about the nature of children, their developmental processes, and the meaning of their behaviors. Strongly influenced by the cultural context, these ideas are entwined with other aspects of life, including time and place, meaning of self, family, and parenthood (see Box 1).

As Harkness and Super (1996) point out in an important contribution to the literature of culture and human development, these cultural understandings are organized into categories referred to as **parents' cultural belief systems** and "relate in *systematic ways to action—including . . . styles of talking to children, methods of discipline, or seeking advice from experts*. Ultimately [these belief systems] . . . exert a powerful influence on the health and development of children, and they are a key component in the development of parents themselves" (pp. 2–3). Parental beliefs represent one component of the developmental niche—the psychology of the caretaker.

Developing a philosophy of childrearing is one of the major tasks faced by new parents (Francis-Connally, 2000; Kenkel, 1985). In a particularly interesting application of this idea, Richman and others (1988) observed mother-child interactions in five cultures (three industrial and two agrarian) and reported several prominent differences. Among the more interesting was

**BOX 1****PARENTING AMONG AFRICAN PYGMIES**

There are about 150,000 Pygmies living in parts of several African countries, including Rwanda, Cameroon, Gabon, Congo, Burundi, and Zaire. The majority range in height from 4 feet to 4 feet 8 inches (1.2 to 1.42 meters). While no one is sure why they are so small, research studies suggest it may be a combination of factors, including a growth hormone deficiency and an evolutionary adaptation to their ecological setting that allows them to move quickly and silently through the forest.

One group, the Efe (who prefer to be known by their tribal name rather than the often derogatory term emphasizing short stature), are hunters and gatherers living in the Northeastern region of the Ituri forest in the Congo, formerly Zaire. They are believed to be the oldest pure ethnic group in the world with a culture, language, and tradition at least 10,000 years old. They live in small, extended family groups (about twenty to thirty people), consisting of brothers and their wives, children, unmarried sisters, and perhaps parents. They live in temporary camps composed of leaf huts used for sleeping, food storage, and protection from the weather. These huts, moved when the food supply runs low, are arranged in a semicircle, creating a shared communal space where most day-to-day activities take place.

Sharing and cooperation among the Efe, in terms of food, work, and child care, are essential to their survival. The workload is high, and many activities, such as foraging, are engaged in by both men and women, although only men hunt.



*An Efe mother braids the hair of a child in the Ituri forest in the Congo.*

(Wendy Stone/Corbis)

*(continued)*

## BOX 1 CONTINUED

There is a strong belief among Efe that mothers *should not* be the first person to hold a newborn baby. This belief not only prevents an Efe woman from going off to give birth on her own, but it also introduces a child to multiple caregivers early. In fact, infants are frequently nursed by women other than their own mothers.

Fathers have an early presence in the child's life. For example, it is common practice for them to view the birth from the doorway of the hut. When not hunting, they and other men are often present in camp and often watch and hold the children (theirs and others), although most child care is the responsibility of mothers.

The developmental niche of the Efe is intensely social. The continuous presence of others, along with early multiple care, helps prepare Efe children for their social world while protecting them from common dangers in the physical environment.

*Source:* Adapted from *Infusing Culture into Parenting Issues: A Supplement for Psychology Instructors* by Vicki Ritts, 2000, unpublished manuscript, St. Louis Community College. Reprinted by permission.

the finding that Gusii mothers of Kenya hold their nine- to ten-month-old infants and engage in soothing physical contact more than do middle-class mothers in Boston, Massachusetts, but, at the same time, look at and talk to them less often. Why? According to Richman and her colleagues there are several reasons for this behavior, all of which make perfect sense once you understand the ecology of the cultures involved. For example, among the Gusii, (1) infant mortality rates are high, and holding and soothing provide a greater chance of survival; (2) there is a belief that language is not understood by children until about the age of two; and (3) the culture teaches that one should avoid making direct eye contact with others. On the other hand, in the American culture there is a belief that (1) language learning should begin early and (2) placing infants in playpens where they can play by themselves begins the process of independence so highly valued in American society.

Ever since Sigel (1985) edited one of the first volumes discussing this concept, interest in parental belief systems as an approach to understanding cultural similarities and differences has grown rapidly (Sigel and McGillicuddy-DeLisi, 2002). This concept has also been fostered by the emergence of parallel trends in social anthropology, psychology, and new interdisciplinary approaches to culture and human development (Dasen, 2003; Harkness & Super, 1996, 2002).

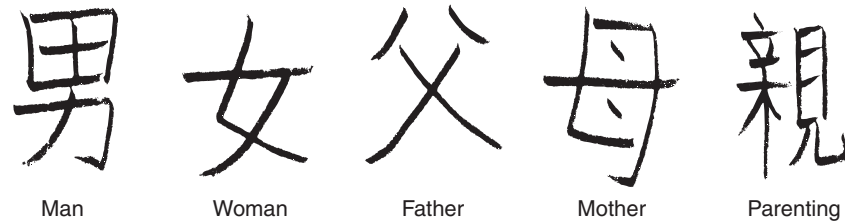
Also contributing to this unifying concept are some of the approaches serving as major themes for this text. For example, the ecological model of Bronfenbrenner provides a dynamic, interactive paradigm of parent–child interactions as they occur within a continually expanding cultural context that shapes the development of effective parental beliefs and practices. The developmental niche framework proposed by Super and Harkness assists in “conceptualizing relationships among parental belief systems, customs, and practices of childrearing and the organization of physical and social settings for children’s daily lives” (Harkness & Super, 1996, p. 5).

After reviewing these and similar studies, we find that the following questions have not been adequately answered by the research literature: “In general, are there relationships between specific parenting beliefs and parenting behaviors?” “Are there universals, as well as variations, in what we might call ‘good parenting’?” “Do certain kinds of parenting lead to certain kinds of outcomes for children, both cross-culturally as well as within cultures?” “What form do parental cultural belief systems take in cultures where relatives, other than parents (e.g., uncles, aunts, grandparents, and in-laws) play critically important roles?” We offer these questions in the hope that those who might pursue future studies in these areas will help extend our understanding of human development within the context of culture. Throughout the remainder of this chapter, we will learn how parents’ cultural belief systems influence the manner in which lives develop across cultures, beginning with mothering and fathering behaviors.

## **Mothering**

In their research on mothering, Barnard and Martell (1995) note that cultures consider this behavior extremely important, especially since mothers are the primary day-to-day teachers of culture. The authors also point out that opportunities to view similarities and differences in the mothering role have been limited, because mothering generally takes place in the privacy of the family. Although these researchers do not use Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model terminology, their thinking sounds similar. For example, they state that “the role [of mothering] . . . develops in relation to the family system wherein roles of father, siblings, and other extended family members are enacted as well. . . . Each person’s role is connected with all others in the family system and because that is true there are always variations within cultures. [For example] . . . as the position of women changes, aspects of the mothering role will be assumed by others in the family or in the society” (p. 3).

According to Harkness and Super (1995), mothering has historically been associated with women, because in most cultures women have provided primary care for children. In this regard, and in light of our discussion of Japanese families in this chapter, it is interesting to consider Barnard and Martell’s (1995) analysis of the Japanese words for *woman*, *mother*, *man*, and



**FIGURE 2** Japanese Characters Related to Parenting

Source: Drawn by Alan V. Gardiner.

*father*: “The character for woman is a stick figure with a protuberance, resembling a pregnant abdomen, whereas the character for mother resembles the chest with two breasts. The symbol for man, on the other hand, is the rice field illustrating work. The character for father is a stone axe symbolizing power” (p. 4). More accurately, the symbol for man is a combination of two characters, one representing a rice field and the other representing power which symbolizes hard work (Gardiner, 1996). *Parenting* is represented by three characters literally translated as “to stand,” “a tree,” and “to watch,” which, when combined, can be interpreted as “watching over a growing child” (Gardiner, 1996). For a visual representation of these characters, see Figure 2.

Barnard and Martell also point out that these characters came from the original Chinese language and represent ethnic and intergenerational thinking about these roles within both these cultures. These character distinctions raise several intriguing questions: “Are mothering, fathering, and parenting distinct roles?” “Are birthing and nurturing unique characteristics of the mother’s role, whereas support and family control are assigned to the father’s role?” “Is parenting different than mothering and fathering?”

In a review of research on mothering, Barnard and Solchany (2002) discuss the concept of allomothering (or “shared mothering”), a term coined by Hrdy (1999), which includes all those people who help to care for a child, “including (but not limited to) the mother’s mate, extended family, peers, and neighbors” (p. 21). These are all individuals we find interacting with and influencing a child’s development as he or she moves among the micro-, meso-, and exosystems of his or her unique ecological environment. Examples of allomothering can be found in many African tribal villages, Israeli kibbutz, and even American day care or child care settings, in which the safety, nurturance, and responsibility for children’s well-being is shared by a number of people. The authors also discuss the meaning of motherhood in the context of becoming a woman, preparation for motherhood, important functions of mothering (e.g., expected nurturing, monitoring and surveillance, and caregiving-social partner role), and explore some of the challenges of mothering.

## Fathering

Research on the role of fathers is of relatively recent origin (Biller, 1993; Parke, 2002; Doucet, 2006), and research on cross-cultural comparisons is still comparatively rare (Aldous, Mulligan, & Bjarnason, 1998; Gardiner, 1994; Lamb, 1987, 2004; Lykken, 2000; Yang, 1999). In fact, cross-culturally, only a minority of childcare is carried out by men. However, it is promising to note that when fathering is studied, it is being increasingly observed from both the ecological model and contextual approach (Day & Lamb, 2004; Parke, 2002; Sullivan, 2004) as well as the lifespan perspective (Elder, Modell, & Parke, 1993; Parke, 2000). Of interest is a study by Marsiglio and Cohan (2000), clarifying the basic features of a sociological perspective as it relates to the study of fathers' involvement with, and influence on, their children. The authors focus on the social, organizational, and cultural contexts of fathering, with particular emphasis on the interplay between social structures and processes at the macro, meso, and micro levels, along with social psychological issues.

In this regard, Parke (2002) stresses "the importance of examining developmental changes in the adult because parents continue to change and develop during adult years" (p. 28). He points out that the age at which an individual becomes a parent can significantly affect the ways in which men and women carry out their paternal and maternal roles, and that education, self-identity, and career tasks are related to the demands of being a parent. For example, the average age of marriage in Egypt and the Sudan is twenty-five to thirty-five years for men and twenty to thirty years for women in urban areas, twenty to twenty-five for men and sixteen to eighteen for women in rural areas.

In Nigeria, among the Muslim Hausa, a boy usually enters his first marriage around the age of twenty, often to a girl of thirteen or fourteen who has just reached puberty. For a Yoruba male, marriage typically takes place when the man is in his middle to late twenties and the girl is about sixteen to eighteen years of age. Among the Southeast Asian Hmong, large numbers of whom have migrated to the United States, it is common for men in their twenties to thirties to marry young girls in their early to middle adolescent years. While many of these young people may be adequately prepared, as part of their developmental niche, to assume parental responsibilities at these relatively young ages, others are not; and, recently being children themselves, will find married life and childrearing difficult.

As Shwalb and his colleagues (2003) have noted, in a review of research on Chinese, Japanese, and Korean cultures, fathering is affected by many contexts, including history, changing families, work roles, and marital relationships. For example, while China has promoted gender equality at work and encourages both women and men to be active in childrearing, Japanese and Korean fathers have often reduced their involvement in family matters to provide financially for their families. Chinese fathers appear to blend a combination of warmth, control and authoritativeness in their parenting



*Father and son find mutual enjoyment during caretaking.*  
(Courtesy of authors)

style. Korean fathers, who historically focused greater attention on their sons, now spend more time with each child because of the drastic reduction in family size. The authors suggest that more research is needed not only on fathers' direct influence on their children but also on how they influence children indirectly through the husband-wife relationship.

In a review of research on fathers and families, Parke (2002) notes that substantial progress has been made in understanding the paternal role and its impact on fathers themselves, as well as on their children and others within and outside the family. Among his conclusions are that (1) while mothers still have the greater responsibility in raising children, the level of father involvement has continued to increase; (2) fathers can and do show qualities of competent caregiving; (3) cross-cultural findings point to the importance of cultural and environmental contexts, as well as possibly biological factors, in determining and shaping differences in play styles between mothers and fathers; (4) fathering roles show greater variability across cultures than do mothering roles; and (5) men's marital relationships as well as their "sense of self" are significantly affected by fathering activities. Think about your relationships with your parents as you were growing up. What kinds of activities did you engage in with each of them? Did your interactions change as you got older? Was one parent more actively involved in your development than the other? What lasting effects, positive or negative, did their involvement have on you?



Finally, Parke (2002) points out that the study of father–child relationships is now “a more fully contextualized issue. Fathers in the context of their social relationships both within and beyond the family are increasingly the appropriate point of entry for understanding the issue of both parental roles and their impact on themselves and others” (pp. 62–63).

This approach and the need for meeting the needs of fathers within an ecological perspective have been effectively presented in the work of Meyers (1993). In order to provide maximum benefits for fathers (and mothers), he proposes that parent education programs address issues such as the enhancement of child and marital communication skills, provide social support for parents, increase their involvement in childrearing, and provide authoritative child care knowledge, while acknowledging diversity among parents in terms of their differing social and cultural backgrounds, including parents who are single, adolescent, low-income, or minority.

One last effort of note is a book by Flouri (2005), reviewing the effects of differing fathering styles on children’s mental health, academic achievement, socioeconomic status, adolescent relationships, and delinquency. The research was based on more than twenty studies she conducted in the United Kingdom using data sources collected over a period of more than forty years. Among her findings are those showing that father involvement protected against the experience of homelessness in adult sons, but not in daughters, from low, but not high, socioeconomic groups, and was associated with low risk for delinquency in sons, but not in daughters. In addition, a father’s interest in child education was related to a daughter’s, but not a son’s, educational attainment in adult life.

## ◆ ADOLESCENCE

As a child makes the transition from childhood into adolescence, accompanied by a variety of developmental changes (e.g., physical, social, cognitive), seeking to find a balance between dependence and independence, as well as trying to establish an identity, parent–child relationships frequently undergo significant change, more in some cultures than others.

Parenting of adolescents has only recently become a topic of concern in the research literature. In fact, just over two decades ago one author found so little information on family relationships during the adolescent years that it was impossible to write a very lengthy review of the topic (Adelson, 1985). While a significant body of relevant literature, as well as several useful reviews, have since appeared (Lerner, Brennan, & Noh, 1998; Steinberg & Silk, 2002), little detailed attention has been given to the study of adolescence in many cultures other than the United States and a few other societies around the world (Arnett, 2006; Noller & Atkin, 2010).

The lack of cross-cultural, parent–adolescent research from the standpoint of cultural context may be the result of several factors. First, many theories of

adolescent development place greater emphasis on biological than on social or cultural factors as primary determinants of psychological characteristics. Second, there is continuing disagreement within the field as to whether adolescence represents a universal period of development. While some theorists take the viewpoint that it does, others argue that adolescence may be a developmental stage in some cultural settings but not in others.

Among those specifically interested in studying adolescence from the ecological perspective are Garbarino (1985, 2000), Muuss (1988), and Muuss and Porton (1998). In the words of Muuss (1988), a strong adherent of this approach: "An ecological model goes far beyond what is presently known, opening up new perspectives and generating new hypotheses that are bound to move developmental research from the clearly defined, easily controllable research laboratory into the ecological field" (p. 300).

### The Ecological Model and Adolescence

Employing the ecological model, let us look at the structures that influence the development of adolescents, irrespective of the cultures in which they live. First, various **microsystems** are involved, including the primary one of the family (parents, siblings, extended family members); the system involving friends, peers, and school; and perhaps other systems made up of neighbors and other social groups. Microsystems are continually undergoing change, as are the individuals who move in and out of them. As Muuss (1996) points out, a healthy microsystem is one based on reciprocity, especially in the relationships between parents and adolescents: "If a microsystem is rich in information, it enhances learning and development by providing opportunities in which questions are asked and answered, exploration and experimentation encouraged, and guidance provided [and it] . . . will foster opportunities for success in later life" (p. 324).

Next, there is the **mesosystem**, which links the adolescent's various microsystems (e.g., family, school, and peers). In many cultures, conflicts exist between the parents' values and peer group values. This lack of agreement can result in family conflict, regardless of culture. White (1993) provides the following quote from a Japanese adolescent (which could just as easily have been made by a North American, European, or Latin American young woman): "When I'm with my best friend I feel safe. Talking to her gives me peace. She never gets angry, or tries to get me to change. And she never embarrasses me in public the way my mother does" (p. 144). Most of us can think of a time when one of our parents embarrassed us in public. What events do you recall? How did you feel and what did you do?

While an adolescent may not actively participate in the next ecological level, the **exosystem**, much of what goes on there (e.g., at local government meetings, in parents' workplaces, or in the mass media) may indirectly affect her. For example, the school board in Salto, Uruguay, may determine

that school enrollment will be down next year and be unable to hire fourteen-year-old Manuel Sacco's mother, Graciela, to teach for them. This will lower the family income and mean that Manuel and his brother and sister will have fewer new clothes and less food and may have to transfer to other schools.

Finally, there is the adolescent's **macrosystem**. Although of considerable importance, this is probably the least studied of all ecological systems; except for anthropological research, it almost never receives systematic investigation. As Muuss (1996) points out, "Although the macrosystem does not impinge directly on the life of the individual adolescent . . . it contains an overarching societal ground plan for the ecology of human development. [This includes] . . . a core of general cultural, political, social, legal, religious, economic, and educational values and, most important, public policy. As such, a macrosystem may be thought of as a societal blueprint" (p. 330).

These macrosystem values frequently find expression in social customs and what the culture considers fashionable at various times. For example, the macrosystem frequently determines standards of physical attractiveness and what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior for each sex. Physical attractiveness appears to be important to adolescents throughout the world, yet one culture's definition of what is considered physically attractive may differ from another's. In many Western countries, especially the United States, the media (television, movies, and magazines) portray thinness as the female ideal. In certain African cultures, scarring of the face is considered physically attractive. In China, at one point in its history, binding a woman's feet to keep them small and dainty was a sign of beauty.

### **Cross-Cultural Differences in Adolescent Peer Relationships**

The role of **peers**—*individuals of similar age and sometimes the same gender*—is very important in the microsystems and exosystems, as well as in the social settings component of the developmental niche of some adolescents. There are significant social and cultural differences in the specific influences peers and friends have on adolescents. For example, peer groups play a much greater role in Western societies, where extended education is the norm, than in more traditional societies, where schooling ends in the early adolescent years. An early study by Hsu, Watrous, and Lord (1961) in which second-, third-, and fourth-generation adolescents of Chinese background in Hawaii were compared to a matched group of Chicago adolescents supports this idea. Findings revealed that the Hawaiian group was more family oriented, less rebellious, and less troubled by adolescence than the Chicago group, which tended to be more oriented toward peers.

Schlegel and Barry (1991), in a well-designed and pioneering interdisciplinary study, looked at a wide range of preindustrial societies located in such present-day countries as Argentina, Indonesia, Turkey, West Africa, Brazil, Cameroon, Canada, China, Peru, and the United States and the role played by the cultural context in adolescent development, particularly the influence of group similarities and differences. They take a cross-cultural approach, viewing adolescence as a universal social and cultural phenomenon. Although the samples in this study “represent a world that has vanished,” it provides a model for future research on cross-cultural human development, especially in modernizing societies, where once traditional peoples are making a transition to industrialization and experiencing rapid, and often overwhelming, social change. Using data from 186 cultures and 340 variables representing a broad range of adolescent issues, Schlegel and Barry offer detailed comparisons and contrasts on parent–adolescent relationships, adolescent sexuality, social markers defining transitions from childhood to adolescence and to adulthood, rites of passage, changes in social roles, and a variety of other topics. Throughout their investigation, they attempt to assess adolescent behavior as it occurs across cultures, while carefully analyzing which behaviors appear to be culture-specific (emics) and which can be considered universal (etics).

Among their many findings are the following: (1) Passage into adolescence is easier for girls than boys because the break from childhood is not as severe; (2) girls are not innately less competitive than boys, and when gender differences are shown to exist, they are likely a result of factors within the social settings that promote or inhibit such behavior; (3) the length of the adolescent period is not arbitrarily defined but instead is the outcome of a number of factors in the “cultural manipulation of biological givens”; and (4) adolescent antisocial behavior has its roots in childhood, perhaps even as early as infancy.

Schlegel and Barry conclude their study by stating, “The societies in our sample are very different today from what they were when the first ethnographic reports on them were made. Many important aspects of life have changed, and the experience of adolescence has altered in irrevocable ways. Are the patterns we have established for this preindustrial sample characteristic of the ‘other’ and not the West and the industrializing societies following its lead? We think not” (1991, p. 208).

To lend support to this, they comment on adolescence in modernizing societies and consider the implications of their findings for understanding adolescence in industrialized Western societies by presenting several hypotheses and suggestions for further research. These include speculations about adolescent-family-peer relationships, development of antisocial and delinquent behavior, and adolescent-motherhood issues at the forefront in many of today’s modern societies.

One final comment from White (1993) effectively illustrates how parental belief systems affect the way parents perceive the role of peers in the

United States and in Japan: “Peer pressure in America is popularly seen as a negative force, rather than, as in Japan, a source of support and socialization for adult roles” (p. 37). With this said, we move to adulthood and aging.

## ◆ ADULTHOOD AND AGING

We are looking at development from a lifespan orientation. There is a good reason for this, as illustrated by parent–child relationships in the years of adulthood and old age. Parenting doesn’t stop when children grow up and begin to age themselves. This is captured in the well-known saying, “Once a parent, always a parent.” As Zarit and Eggebeen (1995) make clear, “Parent–child relationships are a life-span issue. Rather than ceasing when children are launched from the family, these relationships endure with often complex patterns of interaction, support, and exchange that wax and wane around key transitions in the adult years” (p. 119). As life expectancy increases, many parents will one day find their roles and those of their parents reversed when they have to become their parents’ “parent.” This is not an easy task to which to adjust and may bring about a great deal of stress for all involved but is becoming ever more common in modern society. For guidelines on “parenting your parents,” see Comer (2006).

If couples have been successful in meeting the challenges of parenthood and have been able to get their own children grown up and on the way to parenthood themselves, they may look forward to the day when they achieve a new status in the life cycle—that of grandparents.

### Grandparenthood

The age at which individuals become grandparents can range from the early thirties to the sixties or older. While much has been written about parents, relatively little attention has been given to the role played by grandparents in the lives of their grandchildren. This is surprising, since nearly three-quarters of adults will become grandparents, most will be a grandparent for about a third of their lives (Smith, 2005), and evidence suggests that the role they play in a variety of diverse cultures is becoming increasingly important (Hagestad, 2000; Smith & Drew, 2004).

When the first articles focusing on grandparents appeared during the 1930s and 1940s, they tended to portray grandparents in negative terms. During the next two decades, a more balanced view began to emerge. Adkins (1999) presents evidence showing that grandparents have a positive effect on children’s affective and cognitive development, serve as a major support system during divorce and family breakdown, and when raising grandchildren on their own are as successful as are biological parents.

With a few notable exceptions, the majority of grandparent research has been conducted in the United States (Kornhaber, 1996; Smith & Drew, 2004). However, in recent years studies from European industrialized societies and African nonindustrialized cultures have become available (Sangree, 1992; Smith, 1991). Several studies comparing grandparent behaviors across cultures, notably China and the United States, and across generations have also begun to appear (Strom & Strom, 2000; Strom, Strom, Wang, Shen, Griswold, Chan, & Yang, 1999). Nevertheless, it is clear that more comparative cross-cultural studies, using the ecological systems model and other theories, are necessary if we are to describe, explain, and understand both the similarities and differences in grandparenting between and across cultures.

According to Smith (1995), the study of grandparenting is at the same time both easier and more difficult than the study of parenting. It is easier because objective analysis of grandparent–parent–grandchild relationships does not involve as intense emotions as those present in parent–child relationships. It is more difficult because “there are more varieties of grandparent than of parent, and one is studying three generations rather than two. . . . The study of grandparenthood is also challenging, in that the grandparent–parent–grandchild set of relationships confronts us squarely with the processes of socialization, intergenerational transmissions, and change over historical periods” (p. 89). Do you have living grandparents or perhaps even great grandparents? How often do you visit them? What have you learned from them? We suggest you ask them about their lives, make notes, and even videotape your conversations with them. Ask them to talk about their lives from childhood to the present. This will be a valuable gift for you and your family for generations to come.

Due to the high divorce rate in the United States and the increase in single parents, who often have difficulty managing childrearing on their own, increasing numbers of grandparents are actively involved in raising their grandchildren. This adds a new layer of influence to the ecological system, as grandparents represent specific beliefs and values from a different historical period that may be contrary to the values of their children or even their own parents (Mills, 1999; Smith & Drew, 2002). Just as individuals in Thailand or Mexico exhibit cultural differences, so do grandparents and parents represent two distinct cultures, each with their own shared set of values and beliefs.

In a pioneering longitudinal study of contemporary grandparenting, Kornhaber (1996) has noted that a body of research, based on a historical and cross-cultural perspective, is beginning to emerge and helping to clarify the meaning of grandparenthood and its function in various cultural settings. While pointing to the stable and important role grandparents play in modern societies, he also comments that “one of the dangers of ‘modernization’ most feared by leaders of emerging countries is the possible dismembering of the family and the inevitable loss of the grandparent’s honored place in the family and society” (p. 22). Considering a culture’s attitudes toward the aging

process and the elderly, it should be apparent that these attitudes contribute to determining the status of grandparents. In cultures characterized by large extended families and a reverence for elders (e.g., China, Mexico, and many Asian and African societies), grandparents are likely to live with their families, be part of the social support system, and contribute to an intergenerational ecological setting.

Smith and Drew (2002, 2004) propose several theoretical perspectives for structuring and interpreting research on the topic of grandparenting, including lifespan development and gerontology, psychoanalysis and attachment theory, family systems theory, and evolutionary theory. Among the many issues they discuss as fundamental to the study of grandparenthood are the characteristics of grandparents and grandchildren, the frequency and nature of contacts between them, perceptions and styles of grandparenting, grandparents affected by divorce or death of a grandchild, step-grandparenting, and the nature of grandparenting in different cultures. Also considered is the role grandparents sometimes play as surrogate parents, along with their contributions to the intergenerational transmission of behaviors, values, and attitudes. Let us now look at some of the interactions among these characteristics and the specific roles played by grandparents in several of the world's cultures.

Fingerman (2004), in a study of the role of offspring and children-in-law in grandparents' relationships with grandchildren, suggests that children-in-law may contribute to grandparents' relationships with their grandchildren in a variety of ways. In fact, she points out that such relationships "may play a greater role in the fabric of adults' lives than has been thought, particularly when grandchildren are in the picture" (p. 1046).

### *Japan*

Japan, a country continuing to experience modernization, is an interesting example of a culture dealing with the changing role of contemporary grandparents. Traditionally, Japanese grandparents have been respected, honored, and provided with ritualized status through a rite of passage that allows grandmothers to "wear the color red as a badge of her status" (Kornhaber, 1996, p. 22). This once-privileged role is undergoing dramatic change, causing increased concern among some social scientists. Before World War II, most Japanese lived in an extended family made up of three or more generations and governed by a rigid hierarchical system characterized by filial piety (respect) and strong parental authority. Following the democratization of the country at the end of the war, family life underwent significant changes (e.g., abolishment of the patriarchal family structure and granting of equal legal status to women). A recent study of Japanese grandparents indicated that grandparents' age, subjective health status, and frequency of contact with grandchildren, were related to various aspects of psychological well-being (Inatani, Maehara, & Suda, 2005).

In an extensive three-generation study, Strom and colleagues (1995) found that Japanese grandparents believe their status in the family is eroding. While they want to continue to have an influence, social policy has yet to include education for their changing role in society. The authors analyzed responses to a questionnaire identifying strengths and needs of Japanese grandparents as perceived by 239 grandparents, 266 parents, and 274 school-age grandchildren from cities and small towns across Japan. Their findings reveal that grandparents report more satisfaction, greater success, and more extensive involvement in teaching than was observed by parents and grandchildren. In addition, grandparents said they felt greater difficulty, more frustration, and less informed to carry out their grandparenting role than was reported by parents and grandchildren. According to the authors, the factors most influencing responses related to grandparent performance were generation, grandchild's gender and age, generations living together, frequency of grandchild care by grandparent, and the amount of time they spent together. The authors have proposed the development of education programs to assist grandparents in adapting to their changing roles in Japan (Strom et al., 1995), as well as other cultures, including China and the United States (Strom, 1999).

In a study of adolescents coming of age in Japan and the United States, White (1993) noted that grandparents often play a crucial role, particularly when they live near, although not with, the family and are able to provide support for the young person without creating dissension within the family.



*A Japanese grandfather enjoys time with his granddaughter.*

(© AM Corporation/Alamy)



White quotes one working adolescent who delays going home by stopping at her grandmother's: "My mother asks too many questions. . . . So I go to my grandmother's house whenever I can, and I sometimes even call home to say I'm staying overnight there. She empties her refrigerator to cook wonderful meals for me. I am her favorite. And when I leave, she loads me down with fruit and food and sweets" (p. 68). Another adolescent, who takes care of a disabled grandmother, said, "I give her a massage every afternoon after school. I like to do it because she tells me stories about living in Nagano in the old days, and she really listens to me, and helps me with my problems" (p. 68).

Urbanization and technological advancements have contributed to a steady decrease in the number of Japanese extended families with the result is that the number of elderly (*rojin*) living on their own has risen sharply and will continue to rise in the future, presenting serious problems for a nation once known for its extended family structure. Still, Japan is finding creative ways to make use of its elderly and their skills. One such innovative concept is "silver banks." *Rojin* with superior abilities or knowledge in various fields are matched, through applications, with those needing their expertise and are paid for their services.

### **China**

In the People's Republic of China (mainland China), grandparents have historically played a critical function in family life. According to Tien and Lee (1988), in the 1980s, about 40 percent of rural families and 24 percent of urban families were made up of three generations. Wolf (1978) notes that it was common for grandmothers to frequently intervene when they felt parents were punishing children too harshly. In commenting on the role of Chinese grandfathers, Wolf states that they are "a source of pennies for sweets, an occasional place for solace when the rest of the childhood world turns against them, and a good place for stories when nothing else is doing" (p. 142).

In an extensive investigation, similar to the one conducted among Japanese grandparents, Falbo (1991) surveyed almost 1,500 Chinese school-children between the ages of six and ten to determine the impact of quality contact on children's behavior. Among her findings, she reports that contrary to the popular image of grandparents overindulging their grandchildren, there appears to have been no negative effect on personality or academic performance. In fact, "contact with educated grandparents was correlated with positive academic achievement. Contact with better educated grandfathers was correlated with . . . a more desirable personality as judged by both mothers and teachers" (p. 372). Her conclusion is that Chinese grandparents have a very positive influence on their grandchildren.

Stevenson, Chen, and Lee (1992) suggest that this influence, and the role grandparents play in families, largely depends on the sex of their own

child as well as the sex of their grandchildren. For example, they state that “their son’s children are considered to be their ‘true’ grandchildren . . . the ones for whose socialization they bear an important responsibility and for whom they assume a role as disciplinarian. . . . Grandparents feel no great need to be responsible for the children of their daughter, for their daughter’s children are considered the children of their son-in-law. In fact, they are called ‘outside’ grandchildren, with whom it is permissible to establish a more playful relationship than with the ‘true’ grandchildren” (p. 23).

### *United States*

About three-fourths of adults in the United States will one day be grandparents—women typically around the age of fifty; men about two years later. They will be grandparents for approximately twenty-five years or one-third of their lifetime. Thus, grandparenthood becomes an important aspect of the life cycle for grandparents themselves, as well as those upon whom they have an impact.

The role grandparents play and their interactions within families will change significantly as family structures change and life expectancy increases (Wiseman, 2008). For example, four-generation families are becoming more common, with some grandparents becoming great-grandparents. In one study (Doka & Mertz, 1988), a sample of elderly great-grandparents reported that they found their role significant and emotionally fulfilling, providing them with a sense of personal and familial renewal, as well as a sign of longevity. With higher rates of divorce and remarriage, the issue of visitation rights for grandparents is also becoming an increasing concern for many.

Another aspect of grandparenting in the United States that is different than that in other countries results from ethnic diversity. According to Lockery (1991), grandparents of Asian American, African American, Hispanic American, and Italian American backgrounds are more likely to play an active role in the lives of their grandchildren than are those of other ethnicities. In fact, increasing numbers of older African Americans are becoming actively involved in caregiving among their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. According to Minkler and Roe (1991), approximately 13 percent of African American children, 3 percent of Hispanic American children, and 2 percent of European American children live with their grandparents.

Having active and vital grandparents can provide grandchildren with positive role models for old age, as illustrated by the following quote from a young girl named Patty, who said with great admiration about her grandmother, “She is a dynamo. A speedball. When my mom was in the hospital, she came over and cleaned the house and did the cooking. I helped her; we did it together. We dance, and I get tired before she does. She even chops wood. I hope I am like that. She says I am” (Kornhaber, 1996). (For more about grandparenting in the United States, we recommend the book by Kornhaber in the Further Readings section of this chapter.)



*Harry and Ormsin Gardiner with their grandchildren – Mac, Charlie, Malinee, and Siri.*  
(Courtesy of authors)

### **Caring for the Elderly**

For generations, respect for those who have reached their later years has been higher in Japan, China, and many other countries than it has in the United States. While this may still be true, in the case of the Japanese, the image may be overly idealized. As we pointed out earlier in this chapter, fewer elderly Japanese today are living with their children, and more are returning to low-paying jobs to support themselves.

Just as Japan is changing, so too is China, another of the world's oldest cultures. In China, the elderly were once revered, and the extended family was the primary unit of care for the elderly. While the family is still a central focus, it is facing problems and its role is changing. For example, with increased industrialization, many rural farmers are moving to the cities, leaving their aging relatives behind. Those families that remain in rural areas often develop a reciprocal arrangement in which a married son provides for his elderly parents and, in return, receives help from them with childcare, housework, and even gardening. Those who are elderly and have no children may be eligible to move into one of the country's new homes for the elderly. To do so, one must meet four criteria: (1) have no living children nearby to provide care, (2) not be bedridden or require constant medical care, (3) be willing to enter the home, and (4) qualify for local welfare assistance (Olson, 1994). In addition to the difficulties already mentioned, elder abuse, inadequate housing, and insufficient retirement programs are becoming serious problems.

In Germany, community-based services are also increasing but are unable to meet the growing numbers of elderly, 75 percent of whom need help with daily activities and 10 percent of whom are bedridden.

In the United States, and many other countries, as individuals live longer, it is becoming increasingly common that adult children in middle adulthood are required to provide care for aging relatives, particularly parents, as well as for their own children. Finding themselves caught between the needs of two generations, these individuals are often referred to as the *sandwich generation*. Up to 70 percent of this caregiving is currently provided by women, most often adult daughters, wives, and daughters-in-law. In the United States, families provide about 80 percent of all long-term care for the elderly. For a view of how Koreans, Latinos, Africans, and Arabs treat their elderly, see Box 2.

## BOX 2



### CULTURAL VIEWS AND TREATMENT OF THE ELDERLY

As individuals grow older, they experience changes in physical, cognitive, and social abilities. The following sections highlight some of the ways in which elderly are viewed and treated across cultures.

#### Korean Elderly

Historically, Korean society has been strongly influenced by Chinese culture and, in particular, Confucianism, which provides guidelines governing relationships between father and son, minister and ruler, husband and wife, elder and younger brothers, and friends. Broadly speaking, Korea is a collectivist or “relationship culture,” in which the group is placed above the individual, resulting in pressure to conform to cultural norms and group demands.

The *Book of Rites* states that Koreans must respect parents, take good care of them, and bring no dishonor to them or family. Filial responsibility is the obligation of an adult child, and elderly parents typically live with their first married son who, with help from siblings, provides financial support and health care. The family remains of utmost importance in Korea today, although the proportion of elderly living apart from their children has been on the rise. Growing concern over rapid industrialization, urbanization, and changes in filial care by the younger generation has resulted in recent welfare laws and an increase in the provision of social and health services for the elderly.

#### Latino Elderly

While Latinos or Hispanics come from many different countries, they are united by a common language; and although differences exist across cultures, some generalizations are possible. For example, certain attitudes and values are common in Latino cultures. One of these is *familialism*, emphasizing sharing and cooperation, rather than competition. A sense of family pride and

**BOX 2 CONTINUED**

loyalty and extended family support is the norm. Families remain the traditional support system despite urbanization and modernization. Other cultural values include *simpatia*, with its stress on loyalty, dignity, friendliness, politeness, affection, and respect for others; *personalismo*, emphasizing the importance of personal goodness and getting along with others over individual ability and individual success; *respecto*, valuing and acknowledging hierarchies that define an individual's proper place in society on the basis of age, gender, race, and class. These values play a major role in beliefs about care of the elderly, as does the Catholic religion with its emphasis on charity as a virtue. The result is that Latinos often do not behave assertively and believe that problems or events are meant to be and cannot be altered.

In Latino cultures, the elderly are believed to have an inner strength that can be a resource for the younger generation. They see themselves as important members of the family because they are links to the past, and do not feel useless or like a burden and are not ashamed to ask for help. They occupy a central role in the family and are treated with respect (*respecto*), status (*su lugar*), and authority (*su experiencia y sabiduria*).

Children, particularly daughters, play a major role in caring for the elderly and providing assistance, although not all elderly may necessarily live with their children. Interestingly, if daughters do not care for their mothers, complaints are more hostile than if they are neglected by their sons. Daughters are also expected to visit and phone more frequently than sons. When a parent's condition severely deteriorates, formal services may be used by the family, although institutionalization is rare.

**African Elderly**

Black African societies vary in their views and treatment of the elderly. At times, older individuals are held in esteem as vast storehouses of knowledge and power. At other times, their legitimacy to knowledge and power is questioned.

In a majority of African societies, old age is viewed as a sign of divine blessing. In fact, in several African languages the elder is the "big person" (Diop, 1989). Many African women who reach middle age experience the removal of restrictions in an often gender-typed society, and their status and power is approximately the same as men. However, not all views and treatment of the elderly are positive. In many societies, young people no longer fear the influence or ancestral powers of elders and, as poverty increases, there is less support for the elderly.

**Arab Elderly**

Arabs have many traits in common, but generalizing about Arab culture is difficult because of major regional differences. Nevertheless, some generalizations help in understanding how elderly are treated in Arab cultures.

(continued)

**BOX 2 CONTINUED**

Muslim ideology, as presented in the *Qur'an*, provides a sociological and legal framework of life containing the doctrines that guide Muslims to “correct” behaviors. The word “Islam” means “submission to the will of God,” and a Muslim is “one who submits.” Thus, religion guides and affects an Arab’s entire way of life and thinking.

The extended family has always been highly valued in Arab cultures. Typically, fathers provide for the family, discipline the children, and maintain the cohesiveness, order, honor, and social standing of the family, while mothers are responsible for the care and nurturance of the children. An elderly person’s status commands authority in an Arab Muslim household and increases with age. Honor and respect for the elderly is contained in the *Qur'an* and it is assumed that families will look after the elderly. Traditionally, elderly parents live with the oldest son.

*Source:* Adapted from *Culture and Aging* by Vicki Ritts, 2000, unpublished manuscript, St. Louis Community College. Reprinted by permission.

## ◆ THE CHANGING CONTEXT OF FAMILIES

Before bringing this chapter to a close, it should be recognized that the ecological settings of families throughout the world have been changing over the last several decades. This is especially true in the United States. The stereotype of the “all-American family,” consisting of two children (a girl and a boy) living in a single-family home in a middle-class neighborhood with the father working and the mother staying at home to provide child care, is no longer the norm—if it ever were.

World War II brought significant changes in the American family. For example, in the years between 1940 and 1946 three million more Americans entered marriages than expected—many because they didn’t think they’d see their loved ones again. With large numbers of husbands and fathers away in the service, mothers and other women took over their jobs in factories and other businesses. When the war ended and fathers and other men returned, they were confronted by women, wives, and children who had become independent, enjoyed their new lives and resented the idea that they should go back to the way things were before. Divorce rates skyrocketed as they often do after such events and many women then had to continue working to support their families.

Today, less than 10 percent of mothers in two-parent homes stay with children while their spouses go to work. Families are more likely to consist of single parents, parents who are not married but living together, or gay parents; blended families made up of stepparents and stepchildren; or families in which

grandparents are responsible for raising minor-age children. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 28 percent of homes with children under eighteen were headed by a single parent, 77.6 percent by a mother and 22.4 percent by a father. In addition, approximately 2 million children under the age of eighteen were being raised by their gay or lesbian parents. In Great Britain, with 17 million families, 7 million of them were headed by a single parent or unmarried couple.

In addition to these changing demographics, efforts to understand the ecology of families and the developmental niche of children within them are complicated by the fact that some children are born into an intact family, spend time in a single-parent family following a divorce, move into one of thirty-two different types of blended family environments when the custodial parent remarries, and may even be cared for by grandparents at some point (U.S. Census, 2000). While the challenges may be great, the need to understand how families throughout the world raise their children and the influence culture has on this process is even greater.

### ◆ SUMMARY

This chapter opens with a description of the family life cycle and is followed by a discussion of mate selection and marriage rites in a variety of cultures throughout the world, stressing the influence of one's ecological setting in determining the important influences on each of these events. In an exploration of the birth process, the focus is on the ecology of birth and similarities and differences in cultural practices, most notably in Yucatan, Holland, Sweden, and the United States. With the transition to parenthood, cultural belief systems begin to play a major role in family decision making, as illustrated in mothering and fathering behavior during the years of infancy and childhood. Next, adolescence is viewed from the standpoint of the ecological model, and the importance of peer relationships is discussed from a cross-cultural perspective. For many, the years of adulthood frequently consist of the raising of adolescent children (and even adult children), as well as caring for elderly parents. Finally, the transition to becoming a grandparent in Japan, China, and the United States receives considerable attention, as does the recognition that family ecology is undergoing dramatic change.

### ◆ STUDY QUESTIONS

- Discuss cultural variations in mate selection and marriage.
- Define and give examples of parental belief systems from different cultures.
- Consider adolescence from the ecological model point of view.
- Discuss the changing context of families, and comment on cultural approaches to grandparenting and care for the elderly.

## ◆ FURTHER READINGS

Robbie E. Davis-Floyd & Carolyn F. Sargent (Eds.). (1997). *Childbirth and Authoritative Knowledge: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

This interdisciplinary book extends the work of Brigitte Jordan on the ecology of birth. In a series of essays, authors present first-hand ethnographic research findings on reproduction and childbirth in sixteen different societies and cultures.

Raeann R. Hamon & Bron B. Ingoldsby (Eds.). (2003). *Mate Selection Across Cultures*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

An exploration of mate selection in Ecuador, Trinidad, Ghana, Egypt, Turkey, Spain, and more, with chapters authored by experts in each country. Chapters include case studies, vignettes, photographs of courtship and wedding traditions, and original research and methodologies used by contributing authors. Lively and interesting for student readers and others.

Arthur Kornhaber. (2004). *The Grandparent Solution: How Parents can Build a Family Team for Practical, Emotional, and Financial Success*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

This groundbreaking book, based on more than thirty years of research, gives families the tools needed for grandparents to offer support for their children while finding the appropriate degree of involvement with grandchildren.

Robert Levine, Suguru Sato, Tsukasa Hashimoto, & Jyoti Verma. (1995). Love and marriage in eleven cultures. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 26, 554–571.

What kinds of views do college students have on the topics of love and marriage? This study reports on students from India, Pakistan, Thailand, Mexico, Brazil, Japan, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Australia, England, and the United States.

Tom Luster & Lynn Okagaki (Eds.). (2005). *Parenting: An Ecological Perspective* (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

This book, centering on Bronfenbrenner's model, summarizes the latest research findings on parenting. Includes ecological perspectives on developmental origins of parenting, roles of mothers and fathers, marital relationships, social networks, socioeconomic status and ethnicity, and parental socialization of children's behaviors.

*Journal of Grandparenting Research*.

This is an online journal of grandparenting for anyone interested in the various aspects of this topic. It contains abstracts of relevant articles in current publications, with information on how to obtain complete articles. It also includes a research questionnaire that can be used by anyone interested in researching grandparents' attitudes. It can be accessed at the following Web site: <http://www.grandparenting.org/Research.htm>.



## ◆ DEVELOPMENTAL ANALYSIS

### THE FAMILY IN CULTURAL CONTEXT

My name is Matilda Skelton, but everyone—thankfully—calls me “Maddi.” I was born on September 17, 1938, in Elfville, Pennsylvania, a small farming community settled by Irish immigrants (population 1734). While I was growing up, the most common family structure included two married parents, with the father providing financial security and the mother acting as the family nurturer and caregiver. My own family seemed to fit this model quite well. While my father was frequently working outside on the farm, my mother was at home, raising three children, and keeping the house in order. My father felt that it was his responsibility to provide a roof over our heads, food on the table, and be a loving caregiver for his children. My mother and father seemed to effectively balance their roles and were both equally involved in teaching us the values they lived by. With clean clothes in the drawers, hearty food to eat, and periodic visits to grandparents, our home life felt very comfortable.

Outside of the home, I spent time with a rather large group of friends that included boys and girls. Most of us remained platonic friends throughout high school, with occasional thoughts of romance or finding a future mate. As I entered college, I began to think about the possibilities in the next phases of my life, including college, marriage, and children. My parents met while still in high school and married shortly thereafter. I went against this model by first going to college, continuing on to graduate school, and not marrying until I was almost thirty years old. I am also two years older than my husband, something quite rare in each of our cultures.

I will always remember when I first met Giorgio Carlo Conte, a fellow student from Italy. I was studying Economics in England as a PhD candidate; he was completing his studies in International Relations. Giorgio sat across from me at the table in the library and struck up a conversation about football (a game that I knew in the United States as “soccer”). He shared his passion for the game and grew very animated as he described the techniques of various players. Over the next several weeks, Giorgio continued to come to the library, settle into the seat across me, and strike up a conversation. We enjoyed casual talk and learning more about one another, until one day he asked me out. I initially refused, explaining the need to focus on my studies and thanked him for his kindness. I figured that was the end of that. Seven requests later (he was persistent!), I eventually accepted his invitation to tea. We soon discovered that we had many of the same goals and ambitions in life. For example, it was very important for me to find a mate that would provide a healthy environment for children and who would respect my devotion to education and a career. I quickly found that these things were also very important to Giorgio. We were married four years later.

*(continued)*

The births of each of our children were significant moments in our life together. Both of our children were born in a sanitized, brightly lit hospital room. I was not sedated, nor did I receive any type of anesthesia or pain reliever during delivery. My husband was unable to be present in the hospital room while I delivered our children because it was not permitted at the time. These days, fathers are often in the birthing room serving as coaches to the mother. When our daughter gave birth to her first child, she opted for a midwife and labored at home for several hours. In fact, when she arrived at the hospital she was just fifteen minutes away from giving birth! She tells me that while she would have liked to experience the entire birth at home, she appreciated having access to modern medicine in the hospital.

Because both Giorgio and I had full-time careers, we shared in the parenting of our two children. We came to rely on our parents more as the children grew, and Giorgio's parents eventually came to live with us in the United States. I think the transition was difficult for them, but the benefit of time with their grandchildren was worth it. Giorgio's parents have both passed away, and our children feel blessed to have such wonderful memories of their grandparents.

We are grandparents ourselves now and thoroughly enjoy our roles. It is wonderful to see our own children as parents and quite flattering when they ask us for parenting advice! I frequently feel the need to balance my roles as mother, wife, grandmother, and daughter. I try to spend as much time with my grandchildren as possible while also caring for my aging mother, who is living in an assisted living home. I'm a living example of the "sandwich generation."



## CULTURE AND SOCIAL BEHAVIOR

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*Shula grew up in a kibbutz not far from Haifa, Israel, where she lived with her parents and two siblings. Shortly after she was born, her mother returned to her job on the farm, leaving Shula in the care of the kibbutz day care. At day care, Shula built close relationships with the three or four women who were assigned to take care of her. When she was older, Shula spent her mornings in school and her afternoons at the communal area, where she and the other children played and worked under the supervision of adult kibbutz members. Even though her family expected her to stay in the kibbutz, she could not wait to leave to be on her own. She now attends Ben Gurion University in Beer-Sheva, where she dedicates most of her time to her studies and her political activities.*



*Manami and her parents live in a small apartment on the outskirts of Sapporo, Japan. Even though her father is an engineer, his salary alone barely supports the family. Manami's mother, Midori, gave up her job as an architect when her daughter was born. As a woman who was raised in a traditional Japanese family, Midori decided it was best to stay at home and raise the child herself rather than leaving Manami in the care of someone else. Manami has no siblings, and the first year in school was very difficult for her. She missed the undivided attention of her mother and did not get along well with the other children. After a while she built a circle of friends with whom she stayed close all through college. Now in her early thirties, Manami is an independent woman with a career in the competitive business of real estate.*



Manami's and Shula's social and cultural environments were very different from the day they were born. How did these aspects influence their development as social beings? Did the emphasis on collectivism in the kibbutz instill values such as sharing and cooperation in Shula? How do single children like

From Chapter 7 of *Lives Across Cultures: Cross-Cultural Human Development*, Fifth Edition. Harry W. Gardiner, Corinne Kosmitzki. Copyright © 2011 by Pearson Education, Inc. All rights reserved.

Manami fare in a collectivist culture? In this chapter, we examine psychological and cultural factors that influence how people relate to their social environment and develop as social beings.

## ◆ ECOLOGICAL CONTEXT

The ability to form and maintain social relationships is the glue that binds the ecological system. As such, interactions within those relationships shape the individual throughout life and set the context for development of prosocial and antisocial behavior patterns.

During the first year of life, children actively begin to explore their environment; their curiosity seems almost limitless. To ensure continued learning and growth, the caretaker must encourage this exploration. At the same time, the child must trust that the caretaker is nearby and provides a safe haven when needed. *The emotional bond between child and caretakers that allows children to feel secure and to know to whom they can turn in threatening situations is known as **attachment**.* Early studies with baby monkeys (Harlow & Zimmermann, 1959; Harlow & Harlow, 1962) showed that infant–caretaker attachment goes beyond the fulfillment of physical and security needs. In fact, Harlow and others argue that the social interaction that takes place within a secure infant–caretaker relationship is necessary for the development of healthy social behavior. Early social relationships form the foundation for later positive relationships and feelings of security throughout life. In fact, well into old age, the relationship between well-being and social support appears to be largely universal. Comparisons of diverse cultures show a remarkable similarity in patterns of social support from spouses, relatives, adult children, and friends and their influence on well-being (Lennartsson, 1999).

## ◆ INFANCY

### Child–Caretaker Relationships and Attachment Patterns

The process of attachment over the first two years appears to be similar across different cultures. It is assumed that children have developed an attachment with their caretaker if they show distress when separated from the caretaker.

Ainsworth and Wittig (1969) are credited with developing a standardized event (the **strange situation**) that makes it possible to observe the type of bond a child has with her primary caretaker—most frequently the mother. In the strange situation, a mother and child are placed together in a room equipped with toys. A stranger enters the room and sits quietly in a chair. The stranger begins a conversation with the mother and after a while slowly approaches the child. The mother leaves the room while the stranger keeps

interacting with the child. After a few minutes, the mother returns and reunites with the child, and the stranger leaves the room. Another few minutes pass and the mother leaves the room again. Shortly thereafter, the stranger reenters and tries to distract the child. Finally, the mother returns and reunites with the child.

The child's responses are recorded at specific times during the situation. How close does the child stay to the mother during the initial period? How does she react when approached by a stranger in the presence of the mother? How distressed is the child when the mother leaves the room? How does she react when alone with the stranger? Is the child happy when reunited with the mother? Specific responses indicate the type of attachment the child has with the primary caretaker.

Ainsworth and her colleagues observed that children could be classified according to three categories of behavior patterns when faced with the strange situation (Ainsworth, 1982). Children classified as *anxious/avoidant* will not pay much attention to whether the primary caretaker is absent or not. If they experience distress, they may turn to a stranger for comfort. On the mother's return, these children do not actively strive to reunite and be close. Children classified as *anxious/resistant* tend to stay close to their caretaker and become very distressed when she leaves the room. Even when comforted after the caretaker's return, these children will take a long time to settle down and remain anxious about the caretaker's whereabouts. Finally, *securely attached* children will be calm and not threatened by strangers in the presence of the caretaker. When the caretaker departs, the distressed child is unlikely to be comforted by a stranger. When the caretaker returns, the child is eager to reunite and will settle down and relax very quickly. Main and Solomon (1990) proposed an additional category—*disorganized*—to account for those children who appeared to have no specific pattern for coping with the discomfort created by the strange situation. As you think about these types of attachment, can you recall which might describe your early behavior? What about your younger siblings or cousins? If you have young nieces or nephews or friends with young children, you might observe their behavior and see whether you can classify it according to these categories.

This approach to the study of attachment still remains popular among researchers today. Although cross-cultural comparability of the strange situation has been questioned, findings from numerous studies in Europe, Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and North America demonstrate that these attachment patterns occur in a wide variety of cultures. For example, Behrens, Main, and Hesse (2007), in a recent study conducted in Sapporo, Japan, found attachment distributions consistent with global norms for attachment classification. The authors also speculate as to whether the insecure-resistant style of attachment in Japanese infants may be a result of the cultural practice of *amae*. The strange situation has been extended to the Indonesian caregiving

context (Zevalkink, Riksen-Walraven, & Van Lieshout, 1999) and to East German and Russian family settings (Ahnert, Meischner, & Schmidt, 2000).

Toward the end of the first year, social development interacts with development in other areas and accounts for a dramatic change in the child's social behavior. At about seven to nine months, children first acquire **object permanence**, *recognition that objects and/or persons continue to exist even when they cannot be seen*. At the same time, infants begin to communicate and respond more by means of language rather than facial expressions, and they actively check for their caretaker's responses to their behavior.

In addition to the similarities of attachment across cultures, there are also differences. Child-Caretaker interactions and relationships are influenced by the environment in which they take place. From the two examples at the beginning of this chapter, one may conclude that Manami and Shula had very different relationships with their mothers during their first years of life. A growing body of cross-cultural research has focused on three patterns of attachment (see Rothbaum et al., 2000, for an overview). First, research in various cultural settings suggests that secure attachment requires a "*secure base*," represented by a primary caregiver with whom the child feels safe when threatened or stressed (Bowlby, 1988; Posada et al., 1995). Second, secure attachment further requires that the primary caregiver is *sensitive to subtleties in the child's behavior and responds accordingly* (Van Ijzendoorn and Sagi, 1999). New mothers, for example, learn quickly to distinguish between their child's angry cry and its anxious cry. Third, attachment theorists predict that *securely attached children grow up to become socially competent, securely attached, and emotionally stable adults* (Mallinckrodt, 2000; Wei et al., 2004). For more on cross-cultural patterns of attachment, see Van Ijzendoorn and Sagi-Schwartz (2008). We will now discuss each of these cross-culturally examined themes in attachment.

### The Secure-Base Hypothesis

The conditions under which a child experiences her first social attachment are often determined by the specific cultural setting. These conditions may influence the relationship between caretaker and child considerably. Two of these conditions involve (a) availability of the primary caretaker and (b) the number of other individuals involved in child care. For example, parents' economic circumstances or the structure of the community may require them to work outside of the home, leaving the care of the children to family members or others in the community.

Sagi (1990) speculates that the high rate of insecurely attached children in the Israeli kibbutz may be a result of the specific childrearing arrangements. For example, caregivers in the kibbutz (metaplot) are often assigned to work with three or more infants during the day, while all of the infants are watched by a single caretaker at night (in kibbutzim with communal sleeping

arrangements). Sagi argues that this “multiple mothering” leads to inconsistencies in maternal behavior and may result in different (possibly less secure) attachment patterns.

Tronick, Morelli, and Ivey (1992) describe the childrearing arrangement among the Efe in Zaire. Here, children also enjoy multiple social relationships with other children and adults. However, particularly during the first year, the mother is involved in more than half of the child’s social activities. This also means that children spend half of their time with individuals other than their mothers. For example, during the time the mother works away from the camp, her child is left in the exclusive care of other adults or older children. Even when the mother is present, other family members, the children’s peers, or other adults are continually engaged in social interactions with the child. In fact, the authors point out that at a given time about ten people are within sight or close hearing range of the child. Unfortunately, there are no data available from this culture describing specific attachment patterns resulting either from these continuous multiple relationships with others or from the close relationship with the mother although Bailey (1985) indicates that strong father–child attachments were uncommon. However, the authors suggest that the children benefit from this setting in that they develop a multitude of social skills early in life; this leads to better adjustment in social situations later on.

Similarly, Indonesian children enjoy much attention not only from their mother but also from their older siblings. For example, Farver and Wimbarti (1995) found that mothers and older siblings engage in different types of play behavior with young children. In particular, older siblings were more active play partners and facilitated pretend play more often than mothers, thus adding an important dimension of social interaction to the young child’s microsystem.

In other settings, mothers keep their infants with them during work. Women in Indonesia, for example, systematically adjust their work patterns to accommodate their children. As we noted earlier, several North American Indian societies utilize the cradleboard. Niethammer (1977) has written that “all [cradle boards] provide a firm, protective frame on which babies felt snug and secure. A baby in a cradle board could be propped up or even hung in a tree so it could see what was going on and feel part of family activities. After spending much time in their cradle board, Indian children became very attached to them. One Apache mother related that whenever her toddler son was tired or upset he would go and get his cradle board and walk around with it on his back” (p. 15).

Similarly, the Quechua use a **manta pouch** to carry their infants. This is a *backpack-like device that protects the infant from the harsh elements in the Peruvian mountains and provides a secure environment close to the mother*. These and similar devices allow parents to keep their infants near them and to provide the necessary restraint so that children’s physical activity does not interfere with the mother’s work. Today, the use of such baby pouches is a



*A Peruvian mother uses a manta pouch to keep her infant near her.*

(© Craig Duncan/D. Donne Bryant Stock)

common sight throughout the world and are used by mothers and fathers alike. Did your mother use one with you and your siblings?

In conclusion, a “secure base” for healthy attachment may express itself in different ways, depending on the general child care arrangements that are part of the macro- or mesosystems in the child’s ecological environment. In setting the stage for the microlevel aspects of parent–child interactions, the “secure base” is crucial in the development of social relationships and behavior in early childhood.

### **The Sensitivity Hypothesis**

Both the infant and the caretaker bring certain characteristics to the caretaker–infant relationship that become a crucial part of the ecological system in which the child grows up. This happens when some of the behaviors



and characteristics of the mother interact with the characteristics of her child to create a unique developmental niche. For example, Richman, Miller, and Levine (1992) studied the behaviors Mexican mothers showed in response to their infant's distress signals, such as crying and worried facial expressions. One factor that influenced mothers' responsiveness was their level of education. Mothers with more schooling tended to respond with more talking and facial expressions than mothers with less schooling, who tended to hold their infants more. In explaining these findings, the researchers pointed to earlier research suggesting that mothers with more education generally tend to initiate more verbal interaction with the children.

Caretakers also bring their unique cultural beliefs about parenting to the relationship. These beliefs may be culturally influenced, but they are also based on the caretaker's unique experiences. For example, Grossman and colleagues (1985) noticed that mothers in their German sample appeared quite unresponsive to their children's crying. Closer observations revealed that this behavior resulted from a shared cultural belief that infants should become independent at an early age and learn that they cannot rely on the mother's comfort at all times. In contrast, traditional Japanese mothers instill a strong sense of dependence or interdependence in their young children by being available at all times (Miyake et al., 1985). These cultural variations in sensitivity to children's behavior illustrate that while sensitivity may be a universal requirement for secure attachment, the specific ecological systems define the appropriate "sensitive response."

### **Moderators of Attachment and Social Development**

What about the assertion (earlier in this chapter) that secure attachment in infancy is necessary for the development of secure attachment patterns over time and competent social behavior?

Much of attachment research over the years supports this claim. Attachment patterns can be stable over long periods of time. This means that a child who is securely attached in infancy is likely to show secure attachment patterns through adolescence and early adulthood (Thompson, 2008). Also, children with secure attachment patterns have higher self-esteem and are more competent in social interactions (Morelli & Rothbaum, 2007). But again, the relationship is not linear. The following examples illustrate how ecological factors influence the development of attachment over time and across cultures.

Children who experience prolonged social deprivation may reach a point where it becomes difficult to establish secure or even meaningful relationships with others. O'Connor and colleagues (2003) studied Romanian children who spent much of their infancy and childhood in Romanian orphanages. Many of the children who had spent more than six months in an

orphanage showed very inconsistent attachment behavior with their new adoptive families. These behaviors ranged from indiscriminant attachment to frequent switching between friendliness and suspicion. In this case, the changes in the children's ecological system result in adverse changes in attachment and social development.

Sharma and Sharma (1999) reviewed studies of children (ages five to eighteen) in India. These studies included street and working children, school dropouts, children of parents with disabilities, children in single parent families, and children with disabilities, low birth weights, or chronic disease. All of these children in "difficult circumstances" were deemed at risk for psychological and social maladjustment. The researchers also conclude that "at risk" children who were "nestled or vicariously encircled in their family network, seemed to be coping and getting ahead" (p. 412). Although "at risk" from the outside, these children seemed to experience a resilience within their developmental niche that allowed them to develop and maintain a secure attachment, fostering healthy social and psychological development over time.

There is also evidence that broad cultural patterns of individualism/collectivism foster different social competencies. For example, secure attachment in Japanese culture leads to interdependent social relationships, adherence to social norms, and self-esteem based on other's approval. In Western cultures, secure attachment patterns are more likely associated with autonomy, self-reliance, and self-esteem based on personal competency, reflecting individualistic values (Cheng & Kwan, 2008; Morelli & Rothbaum, 2007). Children expressing these social behaviors are considered healthy and competent in their own respective cultures, but not necessarily in another.

## ◆ CHILDHOOD

When children pass the stage of infancy, they begin to develop social relationships that extend beyond caretakers and the family context, even though the family remains very important. These relationships include children in the immediate neighborhood or at school and frequently become quite complex and multifaceted. Corsaro and Eder (1990) refer to these expanding relationships as children's "peer culture."

### Peer Culture and Social Relationships

In their review of relevant research, Corsaro and Eder identify three central themes that characterize peer culture from early childhood to adolescence. These include (1) dealing with confusion, concerns, fears, and conflicts; (2) resisting and challenging adult rules and authority; and (3) sharing and social participation.

### *Dealing with Confusion, Concerns, Fears, and Conflicts*

In the company of their peers, children learn to cope with everyday conflicts and fears through fantasy play (e.g., role playing the defeat of a monster). Children also engage in fantasy play to deal with anxiety and violence. For example, children in several South African communities, where daily life was often interrupted by riots or police raids, played out the violence and aggression they saw around them. Kostelny and Garbarino (1994) explored the drawings of Palestinian children living in Israeli-occupied territories. The drawings of the five- to eight-year-olds frequently showed themes of victimization (e.g., large soldiers with guns threatening small children).

### *Resisting and Challenging Adult Rules and Authority*

Corsaro and Eder (1990) maintain that challenging adult rules serves to establish a sense of independence from parents. At the same time, children strengthen their peer group identity by developing rituals and routines that make fun of adult authority or challenge adult rules. Corsaro (1988) observed frequent violations of Italian and American nursery school rules prohibiting children from bringing toys from home to school. Children attempted to break this rule by bringing in concealed toys or candy, which were then shared with other children who gladly became coconspirators in the violation. Similarly, Marshall (1976) describes a game called “frogs” played by !Kung children. In this game, one participant poses as the “mother,” and the others are the “children.” While the “mother” pretends to prepare “frogs” as food, the “children” openly refuse to perform tasks, disobey the orders of the “mother,” steal the frogs and hide them, and so on. The game ends by the mother chasing the children, who run away in all directions in an effort to avoid being caught.

Aside from challenging rules and authority, it is through games and play that children come to understand concepts of creating and enforcing rules as well as cheating and breaking rules. Schwartzman (1983) provides a thoughtful analysis of the socializing function of children’s play and includes examples of children in the kibbutz, Australian Aborigine children, Kpelle children in Liberia, and several more.

### *Sharing and Social Participation*

As they get older, children begin to seek the company of other children and enjoy social activities. In interaction with other children and without the presence of adults, they acquire a sense of **cooperation** and sharing. One of the most important settings in which social interaction takes place is that of play and games, which represent a crucial element of the ecological system

during childhood. Games like tag, hopscotch, and jacks, as well as soccer and baseball, are played in similar forms in many cultures. All these games facilitate taking turns, cooperation, and negotiation, yet the rules or content may vary with different contexts. Children in the United States may play soccer (what most of the world refers to as football) in an organized league governed by adults and consisting of set teams, coaches, scheduled match play, and so on. Soccer may also be played without adult participation and with makeshift goals and changing teams in a back alley of São Paulo, Brazil, or in a farmer's field in Nigeria. The social interactions taking place in each of these settings may be quite different. For example, organized sports and games tend to focus on competition, achievement, rules, and success, whereas free play activities tend to focus on participation, equality of players, and adapting or creating rules in order to ensure everyone's enjoyment of the game. What games and sports did you play when you were young? What did you particularly like about each of these? Did your younger or older siblings like the same or different games and sports?

Games and play also introduce children to concepts of competition and differential status. Observers of children's peer culture have noted the cultural variation in competitiveness and cooperation in children's play. For example, children in North America generally appear to be more competitive than children in many other societies. On the other hand, Domino (1992) found Chinese children to be more concerned than American children about group accomplishment. In this study, children were asked to complete a task in which tokens could be exchanged for various prizes. Depending on the task, tokens could be obtained by working alone or collaboratively. Most of the American children preferred to work individually, trying to accumulate as many tokens as possible for themselves. Chinese children tended to adopt strategies that emphasized collaboration with others rather than individual success.

In another example, Sparkes (1991) used a dyadic (two-person) marble game in which children had the choice to play cooperatively or to compete with each other. Findings showed that Chinese children were more competitive in this situation than American children in the comparison group. Sparkes points out that these differences may be due to the different teaching styles practiced in these cultures. She suggests that the Chinese emphasis on teacher-directed, large-group activities leaves little room for dyadic interactions. As a result, Chinese youngsters may have less experience in negotiating roles and taking turns with a partner. These selected examples demonstrate that cultural differences or similarities in competitive and cooperative behavior may depend on the definition of these concepts and the specific context in which the behavior takes place.

Studies in Africa provide additional cues for environmental factors that may influence cooperative and competitive behavior. Friedman, Todd, and Kariuki (1995) studied 120 Kenyan children from different backgrounds

(a middle-class Westernized suburb of Nairobi, poor semi urban Kikuyu, and a poor rural mission village). Results showed that middle-class children behaved competitively, even when cooperation was the most adaptive strategy. Surprisingly, rural children also engaged in competitive behavior. Poor semi-urban children from Kikuyu were the most cooperative of all groups. One could speculate that the degree of Westernization corresponds to the degree of individualism found in these settings (i.e., the more individualistic the environment, the greater the emphasis on competition).

The use of the individualism-collectivism dimension as an explanation for cultural differences in competitiveness has sometimes been criticized. As an alternative, Searle-White (1996) proposes a Vygotskian approach. As you may recall from our earlier discussion, this framework emphasizes socialization and language as “psychological tools” for mental growth and development. Depending on how these tools are used, children and adults view themselves as being at a point along a continuum of interdependence, where cooperation reflects, in part, the inclination to stay socially connected to others.

This view fits in with our themes of the developmental niche and the ecological systems approach. When children cooperate with others, they work within their developmental niche and recognize that they are interconnected with others. Likewise, in terms of Bronfenbrenner’s model, the child interacts with other people within her microsystem. At first, this system may be small, involving just a few caregivers. However, as children get older, they do more things with others, expanding their social world. As they become socialized within the mesosystem of the school and the neighborhood, they recognize the benefits of working together to accomplish their academic and personal goals. They learn the rules of cooperative play and practice social behaviors. Later, as children express the cultural values of cooperation and interdependence through language and social behavior, they begin operating within the cultural context of the macrosystem.

### **Moral Development and Prosocial Orientation**

With increased social participation in early childhood, children begin to understand how to relate to others in socially desirable ways. As they acquire the foundations of moral reasoning and behavior, they begin to understand concepts such as “right” and “wrong.” Developmental psychologists have proposed that moral development progresses in stages, each stage representing more mature reasoning about moral thought and conduct (for a detailed overview, see Shields & Bredemeier, 1995). Morality is generally understood as two-dimensional—one dimension describing “prosocial” judgments, actions, and behaviors that benefit others, such as helping, sharing, or comforting, and the second dimension as judgments, actions, and behaviors that may result in

negative consequences for another person or persons. Aggression is considered an expression of this “antisocial” dimension of morality. In the next two sections, we will consider ecological systems and how they relate to prosocial and antisocial morality, particularly with regard to culture.

### **Cultural Influences on Caring and Justice Orientation**

Kohlberg’s definition and assessment of moral reasoning is not accepted by everyone and has been challenged by several researchers (Eckensberger, 1994; Snarey, 1985; Shweder, Mahapatra, & Miller, 1987). In fact, a number of studies suggest that individuals in many non-European cultures, as well as women, exhibit moral reasoning equivalent to that of an adolescent in Kohlbergian terms. Critics argue that an Anglo male bias is built into the model because the highest level of moral development is based on interviews with a 1960s sample of Harvard male undergraduates. In addition, the hypothetical moral dilemmas Kohlberg created to elicit moral reasoning responses and the scoring of the responses may also be culturally biased. Carol Gilligan (1982) specifically pointed to the gender bias in Kohlberg’s theory. In her own research, she learned that women’s moral thought is *guided by caring and maintaining the welfare of others*, whereas men emphasize *more abstract principles of justice*. Gilligan concludes that women develop a different kind of morality altogether, due to their different socialization. Stack (1974) found a similar **caring orientation** (as opposed to a **justice orientation**) described as “what goes around comes around” in a Midwestern African American community.

Different socialization, parental beliefs, and customs of child care—that is, different aspects of the developmental niche—may explain many research findings in the cultural domain. For example, studies of Buddhist monks showed that young adolescent monks reasoned at stage 2 and even mature adults barely reached stage 4 in Kohlberg’s schema (Huebner & Garrod, 1993). Can we conclude that the monks’ moral reasoning is less highly developed compared with Western adolescent males? Huebner and Garrod argue that Kohlberg’s model is only partially applicable in this context because the Buddhist conception of morality is different than the Western, Christian, liberal democratic view inherent in Kohlberg’s theory.

According to the authors, the ideal moral person from a Western perspective is an autonomous individual with strong convictions who stands up for her own, as well as others’, rights. She is an influential individual who uses her power to influence others in a “good” way. In contrast, among Buddhists, ideal moral individuals are those who are ultimately connected (to others, the environment, the cosmos) through their compassion and detachment from their own individuality. Buddhist morality is characterized by an understanding of interconnectedness and interdependence and is more reminiscent of Gilligan’s caring orientation than Kohlberg’s justice orientation.

In a comparative study of adolescents from China, Hong Kong, and England, both Chinese samples showed a stronger orientation toward abiding by the law as well as being altruistic or affective toward others (Ma, 1989). Ma concludes that this cultural difference may result from the Chinese practice of rearing their children in a more authoritative manner than the English, encouraging them to obey authority and follow norms. At the same time, Chinese cultural values are inherently collectivist, emphasizing human relationships and interdependence.

This discussion of various cultural influences on aspects of moral reasoning demonstrates that moral development may not strictly follow a universal psychological script, as suggested by Kohlberg. Instead, the ecological system in which early social participation takes place shapes individual development of moral thought and behavior.

### *Cultural Influences on Distributive Justice*

On the basis of Kohlberg's broad model of moral reasoning, Damon (1973) focused specifically on children's understanding of one aspect of moral reasoning that has important implications for the development of social judgment and social behaviors, namely **distributive justice**—*the judgment of what constitutes criteria for the fair distribution of goods and resources in society*. Damon presented children, ages four to ten, with hypothetical dilemmas that involved the distribution of goods. For example: a school class of children sold their paintings at a fair. How should the earnings be distributed among the children? The answers (e.g., the child who made the most paintings should get the most money) along with the reasoning for the answer (e.g., she worked hard and deserves the money) led Damon to propose six levels of distributive justice reasoning development, which occur from early to middle childhood. These are presented in Table 1.

The two central concepts in Damon's model, reciprocity and equality, are also conceptualized differently depending on cultural context. In Damon's model, mature reasoning about the just distribution of goods and resources in society is guided by two principles: equality and reciprocity. Equality refers to the judgment that people are equally deserving of receiving resources and goods. Reciprocity refers to the reception of resources, either in exchange for a behavior (e.g., work) or to meet a need. At the most mature level of reasoning, children are able to take both equality and reciprocity into account when making judgments about the fair distribution of resources. For example, in India, exchanging helping behavior for money is considered a personal choice, but exchanging helping behavior for previous helping behavior is a social obligation. In contrast, either type of reciprocity is considered a personal choice in the United States.

On the basis of these differences in ecological systems, it would be easy to assume that developmental patterns of distributive justice reasoning may



**TABLE 1** Damon's Six Levels of Distributive Justice Reasoning Development

DEVELOPMENTAL LEVEL	REASONING FOR DISTRIBUTION OF RESOURCES
0-A	The mere expression of a wish: Whoever wants it most gets it.
0-B	External characteristics such as size or age: Whoever is older or bigger gets the most.
1-A	Strict equality regardless of other attributes or actions: Everyone gets the same.
1-B	Reciprocity of behavior or actions: Whoever works hardest gets the most.
2-A	Psychological or material need: Whoever needs it most gets the most.
2-B	Compromise between need and equality: Everyone should get what he or she deserves, which may differ by person or situation.

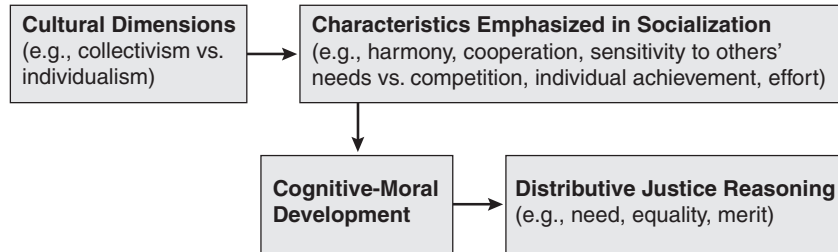
also vary for children in different cultures. Surprisingly, studies in Japan, Sweden, Germany, and the United States indicate that children show similar patterns of distributive justice reasoning, corresponding to Damon's developmental model (Eisenberg, Boehnke, Schuhler, & Silbereisen, 1985; Watanabe, 1986). Other researchers found distinct patterns of distributive justice reasoning in India and Japan, both considered more collectivistic cultures. They found that distributive justice reasoning was guided by equality and need (Krishnan, 1997; Naito, 1994). Even though the results are mixed, differences in ecological systems deserve consideration as a possible explanation for differences in moral reasoning development. For example, Krishnan (1999) proposes an adapted model for distributive justice development, a model that explicitly includes the influence of cultural factors through socialization. (See Figure 1.)

### Aggression

Most children in most cultures fight, argue, or aggress against one another (peers or siblings) as well as against adults (especially parents) at some time during the years of childhood. Learning the differences between appropriate and inappropriate behavior and how to handle hostility and aggression fall within the social realm.

Let us begin by distinguishing between two often misunderstood terms that are frequently used incorrectly to mean the same thing. **Hostility** is a *motive or desire to cause damage or injury*. If someone calls me a name or insults





**FIGURE 1** Proposed Model for the Study of Cultural, Socialization, and Developmental Influences on Distributive Justice Reasoning

Source: Based on material from "Socialization and Cognitive-moral Influences on Justice Rule Preferences: The Case of Indian Culture" by L. Krishman in *Culture, Socialization, and Human Development: Theory, Research, and Applications in India*, T. S. Saraswathi (Ed.), 1999. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

me, I may feel like I want to strike back by returning the insult or by taking something away from that person. I am experiencing hostility. **Aggression**, on the other hand, is *an overt action or behavior intended to cause harm, damage, or injury*. If I follow through on my hostile motive and actually use an insult, hit the person, or take something away, I am acting aggressively.

The form and extent to which such intentions and actions are exhibited depends on many factors, including culture and gender. Research generally shows boys, in most cultures, exhibiting more aggression than girls. Although there is not a great deal of agreement as to why this may be the case, socialization plays a major role, and differences appear to become particularly noticeable between the ages of two and three. An observed increase in aggressive behavior among boys and a corresponding decrease among girls may be related to a greater awareness of one's sex role and a culture's rules regarding the expression of this behavior.

What causes a particular child to be aggressive? We wish there were a simple answer to this question, but none seems readily available. Some say the cause lies in the evolution of the human species; others, in a child's models (siblings, peers, parents, and the media); still others, in the methods by which one's culture rewards or punishes the expression of aggression. We would certainly agree with Cole and Cole (2001), who suggest that social stressors and ecological factors contribute to some of the individual differences observed in aggressive behavior. Rather than attempting to do what others have been unable to do (adequately explain the causes of childhood aggression), we would prefer to view the topic within a cross-cultural context and discuss similarities and differences across cultures with some detailed illustrations.

Bourguignon (1979) gives an example of two children, a girl of seven or eight and a boy of about six, walking along a path in the mountains of Haiti.

The girl is hitting the boy and calling him names. He complains loudly but makes no effort to hit back. Why? We learn that the girl's mother has put her in charge of her younger brother and, modeling her mother's behavior, she is punishing him for being disobedient. Bourguignon explains, "We are dealing with an example of child socialization. Children are beaten to enforce obedience toward elders, a central concern in this society. . . . Haitian society is based on a hierarchy of age and . . . places less stress on differences in sex" (p. 3). The girl is older and so her brother must obey her and pay her respect. She is permitted to hit him, if necessary, to discipline him, and he is not allowed to hit back. In another example, Bourguignon describes a quarrel between two boys in a village in southern France, who are seen insulting and threatening each other. One boy hits the other, runs away, but is not chased. According to Wylie (1974), who studied the village in which this incident occurred, "If two children start to fight they are immediately separated by any adult who may happen to witness the scene. . . . If it is relatives who separate fighting children, both children are punished. No inquiry is made into the question of which child started the fight or which was in the right. They are both fighting and consequently they are both guilty" (pp. 49–50). Wylie further notes that while French parents discourage physical aggression, they do permit verbal aggression (e.g., insults) as a socially accepted way to deal with anger. According to Bourguignon (1979), adults tend to model this behavior and may themselves "on occasion make a great public show of anger in words and threats, but physical fighting is said to be rare" (p. 2). Researchers have found that children from Sweden, Germany, Indonesia, and the United States differ in their use of aggressive contents when telling stories. For example, stories told by North American children include more aggressive words, aggressive content, unfriendly characters, and aggressive situations compared to those told by children from the other countries studied. The authors suggest that the content of the children's narratives mirror their experience with and knowledge of aggression in their respective cultures (Farver et al., 1997).

As these examples illustrate, there are certainly considerable cross-cultural differences in the amount of aggressiveness various societies tolerate, first among its young people, and later among its adult members. With some effort, it would be possible to draw a continuum with the least aggressive cultures on one end and the most aggressive on the other. Among the least aggressive would be the Inuit of the North American Arctic, the Pygmies of Africa, and the characteristically tranquil and polite Amerindian tribes of Zuni and Blackfoot (Moghaddam, Taylor, & Wright, 1993). At the other end would have to be the Yanomamo, living in the Amazon region of Brazil and Venezuela, often described in anthropological literature as the "most fierce and violent people in the world."

According to Chagnon (1997), the first anthropologist to report on Yanomamo society and who has continued to research their behavior for over thirty years, aggressiveness is the major determinant of status within the

group, and learning the aggressive ways of the society begins at an early age. He relates an example involving a four-year-old boy named Ariwari, whose father encourages him to “beat him on the face and head to express his anger and temper, laughing and commenting on his ferocity. . . . He has already learned that the appropriate response to a flash of anger is to strike someone with his hand or with an object, and it is not uncommon for him to give his father a healthy smack in the face whenever something displeases him [and he is] . . . rewarded by gleeful cheers of assent from his mother and from the other adults in the household” (p. 127).

Why are the Yanomamo so aggressive? According to Chagnon (1997), a great deal of conflict, aggression, and fighting centers around sex, infidelity or suspicion of infidelity, failure to deliver to a suitor a promised wife, revenge, accusations of sorcery, or “harmful magic that ‘causes’ death” (p. 97).

In contrast, Ember and Ember (2003) cite an example from the Semai of central Malaya, a group known for its timidity, who say, “We do not get angry” The Semai raise their children to be nonviolent and, on the rare occasion that one of them may show anger, do not use physical punishment. With this kind of socialization, children are seldom exposed to aggressive models and, as a result, have no aggressive behavior to imitate. Robarchek and Robarchek (1998) have compared the Semai, one of the world’s most peaceful cultures, with the Waorani of Amazonian Ecuador, another of the world’s most violent societies. The study is worth noting, especially because the two cultures are similar in their ecological contexts, ways of living, level of technology, and social organization; yet, their attitudes toward violence and their patterns of behavior are at opposite extremes.

### ***Bullying***

It is estimated that between 5 and 45 percent of children worldwide are victimized by ongoing aggressive peer behavior, also described as “bullying” (Pepler et al., 2004). Among the first countries to draw attention to the prevalence and negative effects of bullying was Japan. According to a 2006 survey by the Ministry of Education, there were 124,898 reported cases of bullying in Japanese schools: 51,310 cases at junior high schools, 12,307 at high schools, and 384 at special education schools. Most of the bullying took place in primary schools with 60,897 cases.

This particular pattern of childhood aggression can take on many forms: (1) verbal bullying, including derogatory comments and bad names; (2) bullying through social exclusion or isolation; (3) physical bullying such as hitting, kicking, shoving, and spitting; (4) bullying through lies and false rumors; (5) having money or other things taken or damaged by students who bully; (6) being threatened or being forced to do things by students who bully; (7) racial bullying; (8) sexual bullying; and (9) cyber-bullying (via cell phone or Internet).

Bullying has detrimental effects on both the bully and the victim and has become a prominent concern for teachers, parents, and health professionals. Victims of peer aggression are susceptible to depression, stress-related illnesses, poor academic performance, and suicide. The aggressor is more likely to drop out of school and engage in drug abuse and criminal activities. Compared to other children, bullies are also at a higher risk for suicide (Kim & Leventhal, 2008). Cyber bullying received worldwide attention with the 2006 suicide by hanging of thirteen-year-old Megan Meier, an American adolescent from Missouri. Her suicide was attributed to cyber-bullying on the social networking Web site MySpace through an account supposedly belonging to a sixteen-year-old male named Josh Evans. In reality, a woman named Lori Drew, the mother of a former friend of Megan, confessed that she and her daughter had created the false account in order to use Megan's exchange of e-mails with Josh to obtain information about her and then used that to humiliate her for allegedly spreading gossip about her daughter. Two years later, a federal grand jury indicted Drew on three counts of accessing protected computers without authorization in order to obtain information to inflict emotional distress and one count of criminal conspiracy. As a result, several states considered legislation to prohibit harassment over the Internet.

Unfortunately, none of this helped Phoebe Prince, a fifteen-year-old high school student in Massachusetts, who committed suicide in January 2010 after several fellow students inflicted *all eight forms of childhood aggression* mentioned above upon her over several months. Six of these students have been charged with bullying, involving taunting and harassment via the Internet and textual messaging, statutory rape, and violation of civil rights with bodily injury and could face multiple years in prison if convicted.

We hope, after reading these examples, you are able to see how one's unique developmental niche and place within a culture's ecological system helps to determine the definition and expression of aggressive behavior. It is only by looking at a topic like this from a cross-cultural and developmental perspective that the richness and diversity of human behavior can be fully observed. For an especially useful discussion and approach to studying aggression within a cross-cultural framework, see Chapter 9 in the book by Segall, Dasen, Berry, and Poortinga (1999).

## ◆ ADOLESCENCE

### Family and Peer Influences on Adolescent Social Behavior

Although parents and family continue to play a central place in the lives of young adults, the importance of the **peer group**, *individuals who share certain characteristics (e.g., background, age, status, class) and interact on generally equal*

*terms*, increases considerably during adolescence. Adolescents look to their parents and other adults as models for adult roles and behavior. They look to their peers for opinions, lifestyles, and experiences that are different from those to which they have been exposed through their families. However, adolescents in different cultures seem to perceive their social networks quite differently. A comparison of adolescents in Zimbabwe and the United States showed that parents and friends have different functions in the two cultures (Harrison, Stewart, Myambo, & Teveraishe, 1995). In Zimbabwe, adolescents consider adults (including extended family and teachers) both as mentors and disciplinarians, whereas American youths perceive their relatives as primarily providers of emotional support. Second, Zimbabwean young people feel closer to their siblings, relatives, teachers, and fathers than do Americans, who feel closer to their friends. Finally, African adolescents experience more conflict with their teachers and best friends, while American adolescents struggle more with their mothers, fathers, and relatives.

Findings such as these indicate that both parents and peers have a strong influence on adolescents' prosocial as well as antisocial behavior, although this influence may vary from culture to culture. For example, the strong orientation toward family among traditional Puerto Rican male adolescents appears to lower their likelihood of engaging in interpersonal violence and illicit drug use (Sommers, Fagan, & Baskin, 1993). In contrast, young men who have acculturated to the majority culture in the United States are more likely to show violent behavior.

There is also some evidence that parental attitudes are related to adolescents' choice of peers. In their study of European-American adolescents, Durbin and her colleagues (1993) found that adolescents with authoritative parents tended to choose peer groups that conformed to the norms their parents valued. For example, these young people gravitated either to groups known as "brains" (the smart students), "populars" (socially active students), or "jocks" (student athletes), depending on parental values. Adolescents from households in which parents were not demanding and less attentive were more likely to engage with peers who did not endorse adult values (e.g., "druggies" or "partiers"). Smith and Blinn Pike (1994) also observed a relationship between social contact and the self-image and attitudes of Jamaican adolescents. Adolescents had stronger overall family relationships, were better adjusted, and had more positive career goals when they chose adults as their socializing partners, compared with adolescents who socialized primarily with their peers.

Parent's attitudes toward drugs and their own use of drugs and alcohol, as well as parent-child communication, were among the strongest predictors for the use of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs among Spanish adolescents. Recio Adrados (1995) argues that parents and friends act as role models and that their use of and attitudes toward drugs and their relationships with the adolescents predicted drug use by adolescents.

On the other hand, peer group influence does not always facilitate delinquent behavior. While antagonistic friendships frequently foster antisocial behavior, friendships characterized by closeness and prosocial behavior tend to facilitate social adjustment. In particular, peer groups provide social support in achieving social competence. For example, one study demonstrated that Costa Rican peer groups emphasize the generally cooperative and collectivist social attitudes necessary for functioning in the larger society (DeRosier & Kupersmidt, 1991). In contrast, American adolescents often stress the importance of having one “best” friend among peers, reflecting the cultural importance of individuality. Do you have a “best friend?” How long has this person been your friend? Do you find it easy to make new friends?

Clearly, young people’s cultural definitions of acceptable and unacceptable relationships may sometimes lead to difficulties. Roberts (1994) describes the dilemma African American men experience. The dominant Euro-American culture defines male styles of relating to each other, disregarding the cultural context of relationships experienced by African American men. The white American relationship between men is typically highly competitive and characterized by power and control and a lack of emotion, trust, and connectedness. In contrast, the African American mode of relating emphasizes interconnectedness, caring, and the importance of community over individual needs. Roberts asserts that African American men must try to integrate two models of relationships that at times are quite incompatible. As a result, their relationships with male (and female) peers are often difficult and fail to provide much-needed social support. Roberts states, “It would seem that the statement ‘like a brother’ reflects a common expectation among Black men that their relationships with other men reflect the trust, caring, openness, and honesty associated with one’s brother. Unfortunately, the majority of the evidence suggests that Black men are not getting (or giving) what they desire and expect in relating to each other” (pp. 387–388).

### **Cultural Influences on Adolescent Social Behavior**

Arnett (1992, 2004, 2006) suggests a theoretical framework that is helpful in understanding why adolescent behavior is judged so differently in different cultures. He suggests that the socialization of adolescents is largely influenced by factors other than family and peers within the microsystem. The larger cultural influences include school, community, legal system, cultural beliefs, and the media (meso-, exo-, and macrosystems). According to Arnett, some cultures are characterized by **broad socialization** in which *independence and free self-expression are more highly valued than conformity*. Cultures such as these have no commonly accepted belief systems that judge right and wrong behavior, and deviations from cultural expectations are not severely punished.

In these cultures, the range of behavior that falls within the norm is much greater than in so-called **narrow socialization** cultures. The latter clearly *prescribe an ideology that strictly sets forth the basis for right and wrong behavior*. These cultures value conformity and adherence to the standards of the community rather than autonomy, and severely punish deviations from community norms.

Arnett's framework is useful in explaining why behaviors considered delinquent in one society are merely frowned on or even acceptable in others. For example, drinking is unacceptable for adolescents in many kibbutzim in Israel, with the exception of some Jewish festivities, during which moderate alcohol consumption is allowed. In contrast, the attitude toward alcohol consumption by adolescents in Jamaica is casual, and few legal restrictions apply. In Jamaica, adolescent drinking is not a sign of delinquent behavior. Similarly, compared to the United States, adolescents in Spain are able to consume more alcohol per week before they are categorized as "drinkers." Among European countries, the prevalence of weekly drinking varies considerably. For example, adolescents in Greece and Italy drink about twice as much alcohol per week as their counterparts in Ireland. Possible explanations for these variations probably can be found in the cultural differences in beliefs related to alcohol consumption and adult drinking patterns.

An additional factor that needs to be taken into account when defining adolescent social behavior is the status of a given group within the larger culture and this group's attitude toward the majority culture. Gotowiec and Beiser (1993) found a much higher rate of school failure, substance abuse, and suicidal behavior among aboriginal Canadian adolescents than among majority culture adolescents. Similarly, drug consumption patterns of Australian aboriginal peoples differ significantly from that of urban Australians, who represent the majority culture.

Calabrese and Noboa (1995) closely examined Mexican American gang culture. They report that Mexican American adolescents may decide to join a gang as a way of retaining their culture of origin and of resisting the majority values found in American public schools. In this case, violence must be interpreted from the standpoint of the minority culture since majority views are rejected. Another example of differential perception of delinquent behavior is the street-fighting code of a minority youth culture in Mexico (*cholo*). The mass media in Mexico choose to portray *cholo* youth as uncontrolled, violent, and destructive. In contrast, Cummings (1994) describes a complex system of *cholo* street-fighting rules based on fairness and honor. This social structure contains rules about who can fight with whom about which matters and under which circumstances. For example, fights only take place when the groups involved are perceived as equal in strength or number; women may intervene on men's behalf, but men never interfere with women's fights.



## ◆ ADULTHOOD

In adulthood, the life tasks change from negotiating one's identity to the generation and maintenance of one's "own life." Erikson calls this stage generativity versus stagnation. This refers to the *generation of something lasting that represents oneself*. A successful mastery of this life task leads to a sense of accomplishment. The accomplishments may be expressed in the form of material wealth, raising children, artistic or intellectual creations, or achieving status within a community. This developmental phase is clearly affected by the individuals' work and social life.

### Work and Leisure in Middle Adulthood

Cultural beliefs and values influence how individuals come to judge their efforts and accomplishments. Hofstede's (2001) examination of more than forty countries revealed significant differences in how people in these countries viewed and interpreted work and approached their social relationships at work. In particular, cultures differed on the following four work-related values: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism, and masculinity/femininity.

Cultures low on **power distance** put *less emphasis on organizational hierarchy and status between people*. In some cultures, it may be acceptable for a president of a company and a warehouse worker to socialize outside of work. Examples of countries low in power distance are Denmark, Israel, and Austria. Countries high in power distance are Mexico, Venezuela, and India.

The workplace in cultures low in **uncertainty avoidance** tends to *have few rules, policies, and codes that guide workers' communication and interpersonal relations*. In these cultures, a worker's complaints may be handled by different people in a relatively informal way, rather than by an appointed person according to specific procedures. Cultures low in uncertainty avoidance are Singapore, Denmark, and Sweden. Countries with the highest uncertainty avoidance are Greece, Portugal, Belgium, and Japan.

**Collectivism**, according to Hofstede, refers to the *degree to which a culture facilitates conformity, compliance, and the striving for harmony in the workplace*. Peru, Pakistan, Colombia, and Venezuela score high on collectivism, whereas the United States, Australia, Great Britain, and Canada tend to foster individualistic work values.

Finally, work environments in "**feminine cultures**" *promote gender equality, interpersonal contact, and group decision making*. This dimension can best be described as "working to live" versus "living to work." Scandinavian countries rate the highest in "femininity," whereas Japan, Austria, Italy, and Switzerland tend to promote "masculine" values.

Furnham, Kirkcaldy, and Lynn (1994) studied forty-one nations with regard to seven work-related beliefs. Their results showed that people in



North and South America scored highest on work ethic (commitment to work), mastery (need to master problems), savings (importance of saving money), and conformity (identification with the organization and its success). Asian and Eastern countries scored highest on competitiveness (motive to be better than others) and money beliefs (importance of money). In addition, European countries scored lower than non-European countries on all seven dimensions, including achievement (need for excellence).

These beliefs about the work environment are also related to the non-work environment. Studies of leisure activities show that these are both similar and different across cultures. Beatty, Jeon, Albaum, and Murphy (1994) questioned adults in the United States, France, Denmark, and New Zealand about their participation in recreational activities. Findings revealed three consistent clusters: *aesthetic-intellectual* (e.g., reading for pleasure, attending the opera, ballet, or dancing), *sports-action* (e.g., attending sports events or individual sports participation), and *social-entertainment* (e.g., going to the movies, having drinks, and enjoying entertainment). Two additional dimensions that were also examined did not replicate across cultures: *outdoor-nature* (e.g., walking for pleasure or bicycling) and *passive-in-home* (e.g., watching TV and playing sedentary games). The United States and New Zealand were most similar in their leisure activity preferences, with both scoring higher than their European counterparts on the sports-action and social-entertainment dimensions.

Among Chinese adults (Hu, 1995), the first choice for a hobby is reading, followed by social and intellectual activities. Physical exercise is third, tied with other productive activities, such as knitting or crafts. One could speculate that leisure activities, defined as the antithesis of work (see Beatty et al., 1994), provide an environment or context that fulfills needs not met in the workplace. Therefore, one could possibly draw conclusions from predominant work values about the preferences for leisure activities. For example, individuals in cultures that emphasize collectivist work environments may choose to spend their leisure time in solitary activities, as is the case in China. On the other hand, people in individualistic societies, such as New Zealand, Canada, and the United States, where people work independently and often autonomously, may prefer leisure activities that are social and cooperative.

### **Sport as a Social Phenomenon**

As we have seen earlier in this chapter, play serves multiple important functions in the social lives of children. In the following section, we outline how play and games are a central part in the ecological systems of adults in many societies. Games and sport can consist of spontaneous activity or highly organized sport, and participation may range from passive spectator to participating spectator (e.g., referee, coach) to player. Anthropologists and sport historians have identified multiple functions of sport in society. We will summarize these



*A traditional sumo ceremony.*  
(© Michael Reynolds/epa/CORBIS)

findings and illustrate how cultural settings shape sporting activities and, at the same time, are shaped by them (for an overview, see Calhoun, 1987). Two of the main historical functions are the practice of economic skills necessary to make a living and military training. The former is expressed in kayaking contests among Eskimos and rodeos among North American cowboys. Boxing, fencing, martial arts, and tug-of-war are classic examples of sports used for building strength, endurance, and skills in the interest of warfare preparation. However, sport and games also serve important social functions.

In many cultures, games or sport can have a ritual or ceremonial function. As such, the game or contest is dedicated to requesting help from, or expressing gratitude toward, a supernatural being. The Native American game of lacrosse or Japanese sumo wrestling is representative of this function. The origins of sumo were religious in nature. The first sumo matches were rituals dedicated to the gods. Along with dances and prayers, sumo matches expressed gratefulness for a bountiful harvest. This ancient sport dates back about 1500 years, and its ritualized character has survived to this day. The *rikishi* (participating sumo wrestlers) enter the ring in their colorful ceremonial aprons (*kesho-mawashi*) and perform a short sumo ritual. After they depart, the wrestlers scheduled to fight enter the ring. Over their *kesho-mawashi*, they wear a large braided hemp rope tied in the back and decorated with patterned paper strips in the front. This kind of decorated rope is a religious symbol that can be found in many Japanese homes and in temples.

Each sumo wrestler then performs the prefight ceremony with great dignity. He claps his hands to attract the attention of the gods. Then, he extends his arms to the side, palms up to show that he does not carry any weapons. Finally, he lifts first one leg high in the air and brings it down with a thundering stomp on the ground. This move is repeated with the other leg. This maneuver is meant to symbolically drive the evil spirits from the ring. After this, the match begins. Throughout Japan today, sumo wrestlers are honored not only as successful athletes but also as representatives of a small group of individuals who preserve and celebrate religious and cultural traditions. In a culture that is characterized as a tight culture, high in uncertainty avoidance and high in power distance, the sport of sumo emphasizes these cultural values.

At the microsystem level, games and sport serve as recreational and communal activities. They also are an acceptable way of expressing rivalry and settling disputes. On the more distant level of the ecological system, sport expresses social identity and strengthens the sense of unity among members of a culture. Archetti (1999) provides a thorough account of the cultural meaning of sport in Argentina. He discusses football (soccer) as a cultural institution that permeates history, politics, and social and national identity. Archetti describes the evolution of the distinctive style of Argentinian football as a result of two main social forces: British imperialism and the ecological settings in which young Argentinian boys learn to play football. As opposed to the highly organized system of sport in Britain, most young Argentinian boys learn to play the game in the streets, in confined spaces with uneven surfaces. This setting lets them develop strong dribbling and ball-control skills, but little strategy. This led to a style of football much the opposite of the British style, which is very linear and strategic. Hence, football may be interpreted as a form of expression of independence from the British, and as such it has become part of Argentinian national identity and pride (macrosystem). The Argentinian football player has also become an idealized role model for male social identity and behavior. Young boys strive toward this ideal and are reinforced by family and peers (microsystem). Spectators rally behind their national team in international competition expressed by uniform colors, national anthems, flags, and other symbols of national pride (exosystem). Victory of the national sports team equals victory of the nation and fills the members of that nation with pride, reinforcing the loyalty and unity of the country at large. This phenomenon of social identification through sports is nowhere more clearly observable than during the Olympic Games, which bring many nations together in competition.

These cultural examples of sport show that this social activity is an important element in the ecological systems of adults who participate (actively or passively). In that capacity, students of human development have to consider sport and games as central to adult social development. For example, as individuals age and make a transition from active to passive participation, their ecological system changes, which, in turn, influences their social behavior.

## ◆ LATE ADULTHOOD

### **Attachment, Social Support, and Well-Being in Later Adulthood**

Earlier in this chapter, we discussed the importance of attachment patterns in childhood for social competence and self-esteem. In older age, the need for secure attachment and its benefit for social development persists, particularly when relationships are reciprocal and they contribute to quality of life and well-being. A cross-national study, involving elder adults from five countries, showed that such relationships were related to greater life satisfaction overall, particularly when they involved family. Adults, who felt they were mostly the recipients of help, were least satisfied. (Lowenstein, Katz, & Gur-Yaish, 2007). These relationships seem to be more prevalent in some countries than others. For example, older adults in Israel and Spain perceived their relationships as more reciprocal than elderly in England, Germany, and Norway. Similarly, the elderly in France seem to perceive their relationships to be more reciprocal than their counterparts in the United States—both Caucasian and African American (Antonucci, 1999). Lowenstein et al. suggest that this may be due to the “more familistic” culture that exists in these cultures, that is, relatively low divorce rate, traditional gender roles, and families living close together maintaining in daily contact.

This cultural explanation for different attachment styles is supported by a study of volunteer participation among post-retirement adults in ten European countries. Erlinghagen and Hank (2006) report that people in northern European, less familistic, countries (Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands with 17%–21% of volunteers) participated in volunteer work at a higher rate than Mediterranean countries (Spain, Italy, Greece with 2%–7% of volunteers).

In this later developmental stage of life, the ecological system undergoes changes that affect the relationships, which have afforded secure attachment throughout life. Woodward (2004) points out that children leaving home, loss of parents, loss of partner, decline in health, and retirement are all factors that may lead to changes in attachment patterns. Adults in their later years need to adapt to these changes in order to maintain healthy social behavior and self-esteem.

Attributes of the ecological systems may aid or hinder this adaptation. For example, normative expectations that children care for their elderly parents in Thailand result in the common arrangement that at least one adult child lives in the same household or very close by, thereby providing a minimum level of social support. Even if the caregiving is perceived as demanding, a deep sense of family obligation and emotional bond maintains this system of social connection in old age.

In contrast, shifts in familial positions in Taiwan over time have produced situations in which the daughter-in-law gains more importance in

some families than the formerly powerful mother-in-law. With decreased responsibilities, older women have begun to experience feelings of uselessness and reduced social support. This change in social relationships has been related to an increase in suicide risk among the elderly in Taiwan (Hu, 1995).

Finally, attachment relationships throughout adult life among people who are childless and never married present yet another picture. For the gay, lesbian, and transgendered population, the stigma associated with gender and sexual orientation, in many areas of the world, oftentimes leads to separation from the original family. One consequence is that gay and lesbian elders are more likely to live in institutions or alone than their straight cohorts. This places particular importance on the social network and “chosen family” which has been growing as a way of social life in older “queer” communities (Pugh, 2005). Similarly, heterosexual individuals who are childless or who were never married emphasize the importance of friends and other social relations (Koropecky-Cox & Call, 2007).

Even if motivated to seek out social activities outside the family, the decline in physical mobility or health issues may present an obstacle for the aging person. In response to these limitations, older adults may compensate by emphasizing and choosing more autonomy and independence in their social relationships. This adaptation may be beneficial in dealing with losses of important attachment relationships and physical limitations.

In conclusion, life in late adulthood is more likely to be healthy and fulfilling when attachment needs are met. As such, older adults may benefit most from an environment that provides opportunities for social participation as well as for independent living, while accommodating changing physical needs.

## ◆ SUMMARY

While virtually all social relationships and behavior patterns change over the lifespan, some aspects are more salient at different ages. The types of relationships and behaviors children develop with their primary caretakers early in life set the stage for many social relationships to come. Even though there appear to be universal patterns of “secure base,” “caretaker sensitivity,” and a correlation between secure attachment and social competence late in life, early attachment patterns are seemingly influenced by caretaking practices and general conditions under which children grow up.

As children learn to communicate, they begin to form more social relationships; these are initially built and later maintained through play. Social relationships require basic behavioral skills, such as conflict resolution and cooperation, which involve a general understanding of moral principles. Kohlberg’s theory of moral development addresses some important aspects of morality, namely the understanding of normative principles of justice.

However, Gilligan has demonstrated that individuals may also base their moral decisions on nurturance and caring. Though they represent interdependent elements of moral reasoning, the salience of either of these moral orientations may vary from culture to culture.

Along with developing prosocial reasoning and behavior, children and young adolescents are also facing the challenge of managing their own and others' aggressive social behavior. Once again, examples from various cultures illustrate that one's place within a culture's ecological system helps to determine the definition and expression of aggressive behavior.

Adolescent social development is marked by an increased influence of peers (in addition to family) on prosocial as well as antisocial behavior. However, cultural differences in values and beliefs about appropriate and inappropriate social behavior have to be taken into account when analyzing adolescent social development.

Middle adulthood is dominated by concerns of productivity, which manifest differently depending on values and expectations. As in childhood, the social functions of games and play continue to shape social development in middle and later adulthood. Active and passive participation in sports is part of the ecological system. Finally, social support and satisfying social relationships facilitate well-being and peace of mind in older adulthood.

### ◆ STUDY QUESTIONS

- Show an understanding of early attachment and conditions in an infant's environment that serve as a basis for social development.
- Compare and contrast theories of social development, and discuss their cultural implications.
- Comment on cultural influences on parent–child and parent–adolescent relationships. Explain how and why play and games are a vital part of an adult's ecological system.

### ◆ FURTHER READINGS

- Cheryl Bentsen. (1989). *Masai Days*. New York: Anchor Books.  
The author provides a close-up look at this traditional African culture. This book is not so much a scholarly account but an informative and lively view of Masai everyday life. Among other things, the reader learns about the concerns of two young boys torn between traditional and modern ways, young adult women and their social network, and young men who take great pride in their role as warriors.
- Robert Kaminski & Judy Sierra. (1995). *Children's Traditional Games: Games from 137 Countries and Cultures*. Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press.

## CULTURE AND SOCIAL BEHAVIOR

The authors provide practical educational activities based on folk games from more than 130 countries and cultures. Although the book is designed mainly as a practical reference book for teachers, it also discusses the function of games in childhood development, their cultural importance, the types of games found around the world, and the rationale for using folk games in the classroom.

R. V. Levine. (2003). Measuring helping behaviors across cultures. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture* (Unit 15, Chapter 9 (<http://orpc.iaccp.org>)). International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology.

This online chapter focuses on some of the special challenges and difficulties in conducting cross-cultural research, including a series of studies in which helpfulness toward strangers was assessed in thirty-six cities across the United States and twenty-three large cities around the world. Situations included seeing whether passersby would alert a pedestrian who dropped a pen, offer to help a pedestrian with a hurt leg, and assist a blind person to cross the street.

Robert R. Sands. (1999). *Anthropology, Sport, and Culture*. Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey.

This unique collection of research on culture and sport discusses issues, including ethnicity, identity, ritual, and culture change, as well as the effect of environment and genes. The book illustrates the importance of studying sport as a universal phenomenon that both shapes and is shaped by its cultural context.

## ◆ DEVELOPMENTAL ANALYSIS

### CULTURE AND SOCIAL BEHAVIOR

My name is Matilda Skelton, but everyone—thankfully—calls me “Maddi.” I was born on September 17, 1938, in Elfville, Pennsylvania, a small farming community settled by Irish immigrants (population 1734). As a young child, I grew up quite attached to my mother. While I also felt very close to my father, my mother was my primary caregiver. My first memory of being in a strange situation with the absence of my mother was in the local grocery store. I was just two years old and a boisterous walker. I did not want to sit in the cart, so my mother let me walk alongside her. Quite predictably, I began to wander off and soon realized that the flowered skirt I was staring at was not my mother’s. The unfamiliar woman knelt down and asked me if I was lost. I began to cry. Nothing would comfort me until I felt the familiar touch of my own mother’s arms. Needless to say, I was pleased to sit obediently in the cart during subsequent trips to the grocery store!

(continued)



My own children grew up in a very different cultural setting. Both my husband and I had careers and were working full-time. Circumstances allowed me to stay at home with my daughter for eight months—during which I was the primary caregiver. I was a new mom but did not want to admit that I needed any help. I was home alone with Elizabeth, tending to her every need. By the time my son was born, one year later, I had just started a new position as a professor and could not imagine taking leave for so long. We were faced with the question of whether we would put our son, Alexander, into day care at a much earlier age than our daughter. I looked to our families for help. Fortunately, my husband's mother was able to come from Italy and stay with us for an extended period of time. In fact, she stayed for nearly the entire first year of my son's life. As you may know, it is quite common in other cultures for grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins to all live together. Many of my friends and colleagues could not imagine having their mother-in-law stay with them for more than a week! I was grateful for the opportunity to continue progressing in my career, while also keeping Alexander and Elizabeth at home with a loving caregiver. Although I was Alexander's mother, his paternal grandmother was his primary caregiver during his early infancy, and they have always shared a special bond.

Together, Elizabeth and Alexander learned about competition and collaboration. At the ages of four and five, I recall watching them struggle to put a puzzle together. They began by dividing up the pieces and racing to see who could put their pieces together first. Soon, they realized that the other sibling may have pieces each of them needed and it would be better to work as a team. Through experiences like this, they learned the importance of cooperation in pursuit of a common goal. However, put a basketball between them and it's an entirely different story! Their competitive drive is obvious during a heated game of hoops.

Our family had an interesting, life-changing, cultural experience many years ago. During one of our many vacations to Brazil, we met a family from Korea. They had just arrived in the country for a brief visit and were having difficulty getting to their hotel. My husband and I were able to help them and shared a meal later that evening. Each year, they send us a gift at the holidays to show their appreciation. When our daughter studied abroad in Korea, they insisted on having her to their home, feeding her, and taking her around the country. For our daughter, this was a wonderful experience. For them, this was their "social obligation." Because we had helped them years before, they felt the need to reciprocate. I was impressed watching their daughter and Elizabeth interact and find how many things they had in common. They were equally consumed with mastering their classes, selecting the right career, and worrying about finding a life partner! I remember being a young girl and sharing such concerns. I am proud to say that it has all worked out for me. I consider marrying Giorgio, raising our lovely children, and having a successful career among my greatest accomplishments.





## CULTURE, LANGUAGE, AND COGNITION

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*Deratu lives in one of the oldest nations in Africa—Ethiopia, a Greek word meaning “sunburned faces.” Like almost 80 percent of the people in this nation in northeastern Africa, she lives in a rural village where her family grows sugarcane and raises goats and chickens. Deratu, like more than half the children in the country, does not attend school, nor does she have many toys. What she needs to know, she learns in an informal manner from the work she has been assigned according to her age and gender, since this is the way new members of each generation learn what is expected of them. At five years of age, she helped her mother fetch water and gather wood for the fire. Now, at the age of eleven, she helps with the cooking and cares for her younger brothers and sisters. In just a few years, at about fifteen, she will start a family of her own. Deratu’s learning is very much a social activity guided by her mother, who teaches her the important cultural and practical lessons she will need in order to survive in her rural Ethiopian village.*



*Maria, two weeks away from her twelfth birthday, lives in Brazil, in São Paulo, the seventh most populated city in the world. Brazil is the largest country in South America, occupying almost half the continent. She has attended the country’s free public schools since she was six years old. Maria’s parents and teachers have always described her as a naturally curious and inquisitive child. Learning how to read and write came easily to her. As a newly emerging adolescent, she is beginning to look more abstractly at the world and is using more logical problem-solving skills than she would have been able to use just two years ago. Now, Maria spends much time with her elderly grandmother. Although the girl sometimes gets impatient with the grandmother’s deliberate speech, she enjoys the stories of the “old days” and admires her grandmother’s excellent memory of even small details.*



From Chapter 5 of *Lives Across Cultures: Cross-Cultural Human Development*, Fifth Edition. Harry W. Gardiner, Corinne Kosmitzki. Copyright © 2011 by Pearson Education, Inc. All rights reserved.

Deratu and Maria live worlds apart, physically as well as psychologically. In this chapter, we look at culture, cognition, and language and their effects on development. We consider two opposing theoretical viewpoints and some of the cross-cultural evidence that supports or refutes these views. As you progress through this chapter, you will be better able to understand and explain the cognitive and linguistic behavior of these two young women, using key concepts from these theories.

First, let us explain what we mean when we use the terms *language* and *cognition*. **Cognition** can be thought of as *the act or process of obtaining knowledge, including perceiving, recognizing, reasoning, and judging* (Gander & Gardiner, 1981). Cognition involves thinking, knowing, remembering, categorizing, and problem solving. **Language** refers to *a system of symbols that is used to communicate information and knowledge*. How does thinking affect language? How does language affect thinking? How do they influence each other? Later in this chapter, we discuss the links between cognition and language as they occur throughout life. Two of the major theoretical frameworks will guide us in this discussion: Piaget's cognitive developmental theory, and Vygotsky's concept of the "zone of proximal development."

## ◆ ECOLOGICAL CONTEXT: THE LANGUAGE-COGNITION-CULTURE LINK

One of the early debates linking culture, language, and cognition surrounds the question "Do people who speak different languages think about and experience the world differently?" If so, are these differences in thinking due to the structural and lexical (language or vocabulary) differences in the languages spoken? Linguists Benjamin Whorf and Edward Sapir are the original proponents of this line of thought, which is known as the "linguistic relativity hypothesis." Elgin (2000) provides an example by comparing the sentence "I was riding a horse" in English and Navajo. She asserts that the most likely translation in Navajo would result in "The horse and I were moving about." It is easy to see that these two sentences describe the relationship between the horse and the rider rather differently. The English version portrays the rider as the active subject of the action and the horse as the object that endures being ridden. In Navajo, the act of riding is a joint endeavor without any expressed subject-object relation. A Whorfian would conclude that Navajo speakers perceive and experience relationship with animals (horses, in this case) differently than English speakers. If people's thinking really is relative to their language, perhaps we could explain cultural differences in cognition by looking at the differences in the languages spoken in different cultures. Unfortunately, research results on the linguistic relativity hypothesis are not that clear-cut. A few supporting findings exist, but there are seemingly just as many findings that contradict Sapir's and Whorf's ideas.

Researchers have come to agree on a less absolute version of the linguistic relativity hypothesis. They believe now that thinking is not entirely determined by the language we speak. Rather, *how* we talk about people, objects, or events may make us pay more or less attention to certain aspects of these events, people, or objects. In different languages, we find different linguistic elements that make it easier to communicate about certain events or objects. For example, English has a progressive form that allows English speakers to distinguish between ongoing events and events that have concluded (“I worked all afternoon” versus “I have been working all afternoon”). Some languages (e.g., German and Hebrew) do not have a progressive form. Speakers of these languages are still able to communicate about the temporal sequence and duration of events, but they have to make a greater effort to do so. A Whorfian may argue that distinguishing between the duration of events may not be as important in German- and Hebrew-speaking cultures but is more important in English-speaking cultures. In other words, if something is encoded in a culture’s language, it must be important. This milder form of the linguistic relativity hypothesis led many institutions in the United States, in recent years, to establish “politically correct” language. Many view this as a well-intended effort to change cultural meaning by changing language; others disagree.

What is Vygotsky’s position on these issues? He claimed that cultural influence, mental processes, and language are dynamic processes that occur simultaneously. This means that constant social interaction with those around us helps shape the quality of mental abilities and language at various ages. With this theoretical perspective in mind, Vygotsky coined the expression, *“talking to learn.”* By this he meant that as children verbally interact with others, they internalize language and use it to organize their thoughts (Vygotsky, 1978).

Other researchers go even further and suggest that as parents interact with their children, the children learn language and become socialized into a particular set of cultural values and beliefs (Budwig, Wertsch, & Uzgiris, 2000). For example, in her extensive studies of language acquisition in a Samoan village, Ochs (1988) showed the presence of two major ways of speaking the language: “good speech” and “bad speech.” The latter contains fewer consonants and is mainly spoken in informal contexts. Good speech is used when speaking to strangers or in formal settings, such as schools, church services, and when talking to a person of high status. Along with learning both “good speech” and “bad speech,” Samoan children learn about the social contexts in which using each “language” is appropriate. An interesting ongoing debate in the United States surrounds what used to be called “Black Vernacular English” or “Ebonics.” Ebonics is spoken almost exclusively among African-Americans and is learned in informal contexts rather than in formal schooling (for an overview, see Green, 2002).

Consequently, as children pass through Vygotsky's zone of proximal development in their language learning, they also acquire specific cognitive skills and they become enculturated into a way of life. An effective method for achieving this is **scaffolding**, which refers to *the temporary support or guidance provided to a child by parents, older siblings, peers, or other adults in the process of solving a problem*. In construction, scaffolding is placed around a building to provide temporary support. Once completed, the scaffolding is removed, and the building is left to stand on its own. Similarly, the amount of scaffolding a child may need, in the form of guidance and support, depends on his or her ability to solve a problem alone. When the problem has been solved, the parent or others can remove the temporary scaffold (guidance) until help is again needed. An example of this guidance, or scaffolding, is illustrated in the photo.

Here a mother is shown mentoring her young son as he learns shapes of objects and how to place them in the right arrangement. As with reciprocal socialization, parents carefully observe their children's behavior to determine how much help they may need in completing a task or activity. As the activity continues, parents become increasingly sensitive to their children's needs, with the result that children do better on subsequent tasks.

In conclusion, the original question "Is cognition dependent on language or vice versa?" has lost some of its relevance. In shifting from studying language(s) to studying language and culture, researchers acknowledge that



*A mother using scaffolding to help her child learn a new skill.*  
(Courtesy of authors)

both language and cognition are cultural phenomena. Consequently, language and culture are both part of a person's ecological system, where they contribute jointly to an individual's experience. Look back at Deratu and Maria in our opening vignettes to observe these connections.

## ◆ INFANCY

### **Early Cognitive Development in Cultural Contexts**

Piaget's and Vygotsky's interest in children's intellectual development as a focus for understanding how ideas change over time has drawn attention to several important issues related to the study of cultural differences. Over a period of thirty years, hundreds of researchers throughout the world have subjected these theories to careful scrutiny. The result is that the cross-cultural literature is immense and cannot be given here anything approaching the full attention it deserves. However, there are a number of excellent reviews that we recommend to those who would like to pursue the topic further. These include the work of Rogoff and Chavajay (1995), Bronfenbrenner (1993), and Segall, Dasen, Berry, and Poortinga (1999).

Of all Piaget's periods, the sensorimotor (occurring during infancy) has been the least studied from a cross-cultural perspective. A major reason is that observation methods and data-collecting techniques based on Piagetian concepts have only recently been standardized (Cole, 1995). One of the first cross-cultural studies of sensorimotor intelligence, using a scale developed by Corman and Escalona (1969), was conducted in Zambia (Goldberg, 1972). In general, while minor differences in behavior were noted (a slight advance for African infants over American at six months and a slight lag at nine and twelve months), Goldberg's findings tend to support Piaget's observations. A later study, conducted by Dasen and his colleagues (1978) on the Ivory Coast, suggested that African infants are advanced in their development of object permanency and other object-related cognitive behaviors. In yet another African study, this one conducted in Nigeria, Mundy-Castle and Okonji (1976) reported that while early manipulation of objects is similar for English and Igbo infants, important differences emerge in later interactions. What they have to say about these differences lends support to our emphasis on the importance of looking at cognitive behavior from an ecological point of view. Specifically, Mundy-Castle (1974) proposed that, after a certain age, European and American infants develop increased experiences in the handling of objects, with their attention "more often deliberately focused on objective properties of reality," whereas "African babies receive more social stimulation and early emotional support than European babies. The issue here is whether in the long run this divergent stimulation brings about a differential patterning of cognitive development, with Africans acquiring an

intelligence that is more socially oriented, while Europeans acquire one that is more technologically oriented" (pp. 19–20). Although not specifically mentioned, since this was not the concern, the microsystem (family) and macrosystem (cultural values) have an important effect on the development of these cognitive behaviors.

In an early review of the cross-cultural literature, Dasen and Heron (1981) recognized that differences in the ages at which the substages of this period are attained do occur. However, they go on to stress that "in emphasizing these cultural differences, we may overlook the amazing commonality reported by all these studies: in fact, the qualitative characteristics of sensorimotor development remain nearly identical in all infants studied so far, despite vast differences in their cultural environments" (p. 305). Werner, however, concluded that "even in the first stage of cognitive development, that of sensorimotor intelligence, culture seems to influence the rate of development to some extent, although, admittedly, the similarity of structure and process is more striking than the differences. Content seems to have little relevance to the activation of sensorimotor schemata" (1979, p. 216).

### **Language Acquisition**

Along with these astounding cognitive developments, infancy is also marked by the first attempts to produce speech and language. Prominent linguist Noam Chomsky believes that language ability is "hardwired" into the human brain. When born, infants have the entire range of human language possibilities available to them. Which language(s) they acquire depends on the languages to which they are exposed on a regular basis. Research has shown that the babbling sounds of infants show remarkably similar patterns across many languages (MacNeilage & Davis, 2000). That means that all infants produce basic sounds such as "ma," "da," "fa," "ba," and so on. At this point, parents and others in the child's social environment begin to play a crucial role in language development. If the infant produces a sound that is part of the language spoken in her environment, this sound is acknowledged and celebrated as an attempt to communicate (those of you with children or young siblings can remember the excitement surrounding the first utterance of "Dada" or "Mama"). In contrast, any sound that is not part of the language environment is dismissed as babbling. Soon, due to lack of encouragement, the infant stops producing these nonrelevant sounds and focuses on combining relevant sounds into meaningful words. This account of language acquisition demonstrates Vygotsky's concept of scaffolding as well as the developmental niche. The caretakers, with their specific language characteristics, gently guide the child in developing the tools for communication within a specific cultural environment. Once the child has learned language to communicate, the basis for facilitating further cognitive and language development through social interaction is set.

Cross-cultural studies of language development show that the acquisition of certain linguistic elements, such as nouns, verbs, and grammatical structure, may vary (Casadio, Casadio, & Bates, 1999). A variety of studies examining the child's understanding and use of these language markers in Mandarin, Italian, and English showed the following general results: an overall bias in infancy to use nouns; no differences among children in these cultures in the time they begin to use nouns; and as the use of verbs varies across languages, so does the complexity of grammar and vocabulary.

These examples clearly demonstrate Vygotsky's claim that culture plays an active role in directing cognitive activity, even in infancy. Uzgiris and Raeff (1995), in a study of parent-child play interactions, stated that the variety of activities involved in play (e.g., talking, touching, and interacting) help children to learn skills that will enable them to be active participants in later cultural interactions. You can probably see how these ideas fit into and support our major themes. For example, it is within the family context (mesosystem) that early parent-child interactions take place. It is here that infants are introduced to activities (e.g., play and the use of language) that help prepare them for successful participation in the broader cultural contexts of the workplace (exosystem) and understanding of important values and attitudes (macrosystem).

Along similar lines, Bornstein and his colleagues (1992, 2000) looked at the various ways in which young infants in Argentina, France, Japan, and the United States were engaged in conversation by their mothers. In each of these cultures, mothers were more conversant with older children (thirteen-month-olds) than they were with younger children (five-month-olds), and exhibited a variety of cultural differences in interactions and speech patterns when talking with them. For example, expressive speech was employed more often by Japanese mothers than it was by French, Argentinean, or American mothers. Japanese mothers also were more responsive to their children when they were engaged in play with them, while American mothers responded more quickly and favorably to their children when they were playing with physical objects. This behavior on the part of Japanese mothers is compatible with their culture's stress on interdependence as an important value.

French, American, and Argentinean mothers, on the other hand, gave greater attention to speech that communicated information to their infant or child. This is consistent with other findings in cultures characterized by individualistic behavior, such as the three Western societies represented in this study. Still, not all of these mothers communicated the same kind of information to their children. For example, American mothers asked lots of questions, reflecting, in part, the view within American society that children are active participants in the learning process and often (as we saw in our earlier theoretical discussion) construct their own knowledge. In contrast, French





*Family playtimes provide opportunities for language acquisition and development.*  
(Courtesy of authors)

mothers provided their infants and children with less stimulation but greater emotional support. Finally, Argentinean mothers appeared to be the most direct in their interactions with their children, which is indicative of a more authoritarian approach to dealing with children (Bornstein et al., 1992).

### **Early Second-Language Acquisition and Bilingualism**

Contact between individuals who do not share the same language has become commonplace in today's world. For example, immigrants may share neighborhoods with natives, international business people may spend months abroad, and refugees may seek an escape from war in their own countries. The need to communicate in a new ecological system often makes it necessary to acquire a second language—to become bilingual. We raise this discussion on bilingualism in this chapter because it illustrates the dynamics of the language–cognition–culture link within a developmental framework. Questions such as “Do children learn a second language faster or better than adults?” or “Does the age at which a person learns the language affect how the language is learned?” have been at the center of bilingualism research for many years.

#### ***Developmental Factors***

A popular view claims that before a certain age, children learn a language naturally and easily. This supports the idea of a “critical period” for second-



language acquisition. The “critical period” lasts a specific number of years during which a second language can be learned as easily and as well as the first language. However, after this critical period, a language learner will have greater difficulty being able to acquire a second language to the same extent he or she did with the native language.

The age at which this critical period is supposed to occur is one of several points debated by those interested in language. Some set the first ten years of life as the critical years for language acquisition. Others suggest that no distinctions in language learning can be found until after puberty. However, more recent studies contradict the “critical period” assumption entirely. In particular, Birdsong and Molis (2001) found that postpubescent learners were not always less proficient than younger learners, and, in fact, some late-learners spoke the language as well as native speakers. This should not be the case if a true “critical period” for language acquisition exists. Hakuta, Bialystok, and Wiley (2003) report similar results in their analysis of data from over 2 million Spanish and Chinese immigrants. They observed a decline in second-language proficiency among older immigrants, but the decline was not as steep as might be expected outside a “critical period.”

Although research does not completely support the claim that second language acquisition is limited by a “critical period” of development, we can reliably assume that “younger is better” when it comes to learning a second language. After a thorough review of existing research, Ellis (1994) concludes that (1) children learn a second language faster than adults in the long-run, and (2) early second-language learners are more likely to have a native-like pronunciation and proficiency than late-learners. In addition, findings about brain development in infancy favor second-language acquisition at a very young age. Kuhl and her colleagues (2008) argue that the brain is “primed” for the sounds of a particular language by about the eleventh month of life. If infants are exposed to only one language, their brain will not process sounds associated with another language. On the other hand, a child that grows up in a bilingual environment, will learn two languages in the same manner as if it were one language. The brain has not learned to distinguish the two and is flexible enough to process both. Does this mean that taking language classes in high school or at the university are useless, as students cannot expect to become proficient in a second language? What has been your experience? We now turn to the ecological model for additional insights on bilingualism.

### *Ecological Factors*

An easily identifiable ecological factor that influences second-language acquisition is the learning context itself. Sociolinguists distinguish two types of situations in which a second language can be learned, including (1) natural settings and (2) educational settings. Examples of “natural settings” might include

learning a second language as a native language, while living in a country—a setting familiar to most immigrants. A natural setting is also present when learning a second language that serves as the “official language” of a country. For example, India maintains English as one of two “official” languages (Hindi being the other), which makes it necessary for many Indians to learn English as their second language. “Official” languages other than the native languages can also be found in Zaire (French) and Nigeria (English). Yet, even in “natural bilingual settings,” the ecological system may shape the mastery and fluency a child can achieve in both languages. The story of Harry Gardiner’s three-year-old daughter, Alisa, can be aptly cited here as she becomes aware of speaking two languages. She explains: “I thought it was all one big language and Mommy understood some words and you understood others and I understood them all!” Clearly, the parents provided Alisa with an environment that fostered bilingualism. Kasuya (2002) agrees when stating, “. . . there are some socialization circumstances which almost always produce bilingual children, and other socialization circumstances that produce monolingual children. . . .” (p. 295). For example, such circumstances include how many family members communicate regularly in one or both languages and how accepted both languages are in the larger community. Is more than one language spoken in your home? If so, can you use both of them? Is your ability about equal in each? Can you read and write both languages?

Educational settings, on the other hand, are those in which formal second-language instruction takes place. The traditional “foreign language classroom,” a common high school or college experience for many readers, comes immediately to mind. In addition, other educational settings might include bilingual education programs (for immigrant students in the United States) or education of ethnic minority children (in mainstream classrooms) as is common in Britain, Germany, and the United States. Have you studied another language in school? How successful are you in speaking and reading it?

A widespread assumption is that a second language is learned differently in different settings but that the patterns are somewhat unclear. We do know that it is not always the natural setting that leads to successful mastery of a second language. In fact, it is more likely that educational settings provide better opportunities to learn a second language, but only if they involve immersion in both the native and the second language (e.g., bilingual programs). Speaking in “ecological terms,” being immersed in a second language means language is used within multiple levels of the ecological model (e.g., school, workplace, sports club, grocery store, and the media).

Related to these settings are important social and psychological factors. For example, there is general agreement among researchers that attitudes toward the target language and culture, as well as motivation to learn the language, have an enormous influence on second-language learning. In an illustrative study, Scully (2000) collected data from Filipinas (who married into

**TABLE 1** Attitudes toward Native and Target Culture and Potential Outcomes of Second-Language Learning

ATTITUDES TOWARD		POTENTIAL LEARNING OUTCOME
<i>Native Culture</i>	<i>Culture Target</i>	
+	+	Strong motivation and high proficiency in both languages
–	+	Strong motivation to learn target language, losing competence in the native language
+	–	Failure to acquire the second language, maintaining native language only
–	–	Failure to learn second language, and losing native language competence

+ positive attitudes

– negative attitudes

Source: Based on material from *The Study of Second-Language Acquisition* by R. Ellis, 1994. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press.

Japanese households) about their attitudes toward Japanese culture and their success in learning Japanese. The author found that immersion in the culture and family life, as well as positive attitudes toward Japanese culture, predicted successful mastery of Japanese. See Table 1 for a depiction of the relationship of attitudes, motivation, and potential language learning outcome.

A possible answer to the question posed earlier in this section could be as follows: individuals who wish to learn a second language at an older age may indeed develop near-native proficiency if they can choose a favorable ecological system and have a positive attitude!

## ◆ CHILDHOOD

As we move from the infancy and early childhood periods to the school-age period, the majority of cross-cultural Piagetian studies have focused on the transition from the preoperational period to the concrete operational period and the attainment of conservation (Gardiner, 1994). These studies show great variability in their findings (Rogoff, 1990). Fishbein (1984) points out that the research literature on these topics, published during the 1960s and early 1970s, reports consistently more advanced development in children from Westernized cultures when compared with children from developing cultures. However, Kamara and Easley (1977) have drawn attention to what they feel are three serious faults with the majority of this work. They express the following criticisms: (1) the study of thinking in both of these periods

depends heavily on the use of language, yet most of the researchers who conducted these early studies had little knowledge of either the culture or the language of their subjects; (2) although Piaget favored the use of clinical interviews for gathering information about children's thinking processes, many of these investigators attempted to employ various types of standardized measures that required little use of language; and (3) accurate birth dates of subjects were not always available, and attempts to approximate ages were frequently off by as much as two years. These are serious criticisms still deserving of further attention on the part of cross-cultural researchers.

### **Stages of Knowing and Learning**

In an extremely interesting and creative cross-cultural study, Nyiti (1982) attempted to avoid the pitfalls mentioned by Kamara by varying the languages used and by employing three of Piaget's well-known conservation tasks for substance, weight, and volume. Subjects consisted of ten- to eleven-year-old Micmac Indian children from Cape Breton Island in Canada and white English-speaking European-Canadians. The European-Canadian children were interviewed in English by an English-speaking European, while the Indian children were divided into two groups. In the first group, children were initially interviewed in English by an English-speaking European and later in Micmac by a Micmac-speaking Indian. In the second group, the order of interviewing was reversed. When the white European-Canadians and Micmac Indian children were tested in their native languages, their performances on conservation tasks were nearly identical and were comparable to those of other European, Canadian, and American children. However, when tested in English, Micmac Indian children performed at a significantly lower level than the other two groups. More important, the results indicated that nearly twice as many children at both age levels, when interviewed in their native language, were more capable of solving each of the three conservation tasks than were the Micmac Indian children interviewed in English. Nyiti concludes his study by stating that "it appears that cognitive structures described by Piaget are universal and represent a necessary condition for any successful acculturation [and] . . . while children in different cultures may have to deal with different realities, they all apply the same operations or processes of thought" (p. 165).

In an important and exhaustive review of cross-cultural findings on conservation task performance, Dasen (1972a) sorted results into four types, each supported by several studies. These included (1) cultural groups in which conservation appears at about the same time as it does in American and European children (i.e., Nigerians, Zambians, Hong Kong Chinese, Iranians, and Australian Aborigines); (2) groups in which conservation generally develops earlier (i.e., Asians); (3) cultures in which conservation appears as much as two to six years later (i.e., African and lower-socioeconomic-status Americans and Europeans); and (4) groups in which some individuals fail to



*These young Zinacantean girls take great pleasure in making traditional pottery figures.*

(© D. Donne Bryant Stock)

engage in concrete operations even when they reach adolescence (i.e., Algerians, Nepalese, Amazon Indians, and Senegalese). What can we conclude from this vast amount of cross-cultural data? First, support for the universality of the structures or operations underlying the preoperational period is highly convincing. Second, whether or not these structures become functional and the rate at which this might take place appear strongly influenced by factors within one's culture—further validation of the importance of looking at cognitive development from the ecological systems approach.

Finally, it appears that although the rate and level of performance at which children move through Piaget's concrete operational period depend on cultural experience, children in diverse societies still proceed in the same sequence he predicted (Mwamwenda, 1992; Segall, Dasen, Berry, & Poortinga, 1999). An early study by Price-Williams, Gordon, and Ramirez (1969) supports this view. For example, in one of their studies, conservation tasks were administered to two groups of Zinacantean children—half from pottery-making families and half from non-pottery-making families. Those children who had helped their families by working with clay showed signs of conservation at earlier ages than those without such experience.

### Language Skills and Language Socialization

Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development also provides clues as to how cognition and language might be related; that is, the ability to understand and use symbols requires certain cognitive skills. According to Piaget, a child first demonstrates the cognitive skills necessary for language use in the pre-operational stage of cognitive development. The child needs to understand that different sounds and gestures do not simply stand alone but can serve as symbols for actual objects. Once grasping the concept of "symbols," she has acquired the necessary cognitive tools to use language as a form of communication about actual objects.

Suzuki (1998) gives another specific example of a particular cognitive skill and language competence. According to Piaget, one of the characteristics of preoperational thought is the inability to take another person's perspective. Instead, the child's thinking is guided only by how the world relates to him or her; for example, a child might answer the question "Why should you not hit your brother?" by saying "So that I won't get in trouble" instead of "Because he might get hurt." Suzuki argues that the ability to use passive construction in Japanese is closely related to a child's ability to go beyond preoperational egocentric thought. The results show that children in this study, between 3.4 and 6.9 years of age, interpreted passive sentence construction very differently, depending on their age and on their ability to adopt nonegocentric world views.

Childhood is the age in which socialization through language is most prominent. A good example of language socialization is a linguistic study by Brooks, Jia, Braine, and Da Graca Dias (1998). These researchers examined the ages at which Portuguese-, English-, and Mandarin-speaking children learn to distinguish between quantifiers such as "all" and "each" in their respective languages. The study shows that Portuguese and Mandarin-Chinese speakers had learned to distinguish between "all" and "each" conceptually and linguistically by the time they were five years old. English speakers, on the other hand, were much less discriminating in their use of these quantifiers.

Once again, it is important to keep in mind the larger ecological systems in which languages are embedded. For example, China and Portugal can be considered as cultures with more collectivist belief systems (macrosystem) than the United States. The words "all" and "each" refer to objects or activities that are either collectively shared or not shared. Children in these cultures may learn words and concepts representing a relationship between "individual" and "collective" earlier than children in more individualistic societies. Eventually, through learning language and using language in social interaction, Portuguese and Chinese children also learn about social relationships that are considered important in their collectivist societies. Although certainly a simplified explanation, it may clarify the idea of language as a contributing influence to both cognitive development and socialization.

Another cognitive and linguistic challenge faced by many children between the ages of three and ten is learning how to read and write. If we consider the vast array of languages and how they are expressed in oral and written form, we can guess that the difficulties confronting children in their quest to become literate also vary greatly. For example, many European languages are phonetically based, meaning that a symbol primarily represents a sound rather than a meaningful word. Words are combinations of symbols and, therefore, sounds. Individually, the symbols and sounds d-e-s-e-r-t are not meaningful. However, when combined, they obtain meaning. This specific attribute of language allows the novice reader who knows the symbol and each sound associated with it, to find the meaning of the word by “sounding” out each symbol. This is difficult to do in languages such as Chinese, which uses a combination of phonetic symbols and logographic symbols. Logographs are symbols that primarily represent a meaning; its sound is secondary. Novice readers have to know the meaning of the symbol to understand it. Good examples of logographs in European language use are Roman numerals. The symbol “X” has a specific meaning, namely the number “ten.” Sounding out “X,” no matter in what language, will not help find the meaning.

Considering all this, it should not be surprising to learn that many studies of early literacy show that learning how to read and write are affected by the characteristics of a child’s language. For example, a comparison between American and Chinese first graders revealed a different pattern of literacy (Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). English students had learned to break down words into sounds. This enabled them to figure out words that they had not yet been taught. Students who did not have this skill often were unable to read even the words they had already been taught. In contrast, Chinese first graders were able to read almost all the words they had been taught, but very few of the words not yet taught.

The study of dyslexia provides more insight into the relationship between cognition and language. Do the characteristics of a language also influence the underlying cognitive abilities that are necessary for mastering reading and writing? Dyslexia, broadly defined as deficits in reading and writing, leads to difficulties in word recognition, spelling, and reading fluency. Dyslexia seems to be more common in English-speaking children than in speakers of other languages (Caravolas, 2005). English language learners have to master a language that is not very consistent in how letters are associated with sounds, making it more difficult to learn phonetically. For example, the sound /i/ in the words “beef,” “chief,” and “leaf” is represented by three different letter combinations. Languages like Finnish or Turkish are much more consistent in how letters are pronounced. Learning such languages requires the awareness of sounds and the ability to distinguish them. It is the lack of phonetic awareness that may lead to symptoms described as “dyslexia. In contrast, learning Chinese requires memorization of picture-like characters that represent whole words. Lack of phonetic awareness will likely





*A young Chinese boy practices calligraphy.*  
(© Joseph Sohm; Chromosohm Inc./CORBIS)

not impact reading and writing as much because Chinese-language learners rely more on their visual processing skills. However, in a recent study, Chinese-speaking children with dyslexia were shown to have a disorder that is distinctly different, and likely more severe and complicated, than that of English-speaking children. These differences can be found in the brain as well as in the performance of Chinese children on visual and oral language tasks (Siok, Sprinks, Jin, & Tan, 2009).

Speakers of phonetic languages can hardly imagine what is involved in learning to read and write Japanese, a language with basically three language systems: Kanji, Katakana, and Hiragana. Kanji consists of over 2,000 logographic characters, often with multiple sounds. Katakana and Hiragana are different forms of a phonetic system in which each character represents a syllable. Katakana is a “simplified” form, while Hiragana is the elegant cursive form of this symbol system. Almost all preschoolers pick up the basics of Hiragana at home or in kindergarten, while Katakana is taught in the first three grades. Instruction in Kanji is slowly introduced in the first three grades



and continues through sixth grade. This example of Japanese learning to read and write shows very nicely the interaction of different levels of the ecological system in this aspect of language acquisition. Specifically, family and peers in the microsystem aid the learning of Hiragana, as do extended family and families of peers in the exosystem. In combination, these systems assert a combined influence in the mesosystem. When learning Katakana, school and peers are the driving influence in the microsystem, while government-designed curricula (in the exosystem) and the cultural value placed on literacy (in the macrosystem) exert additional influences as one moves to the outer levels of the ecological system. An ecological system vastly different from the Japanese is described by Pretorius and Naude (2002). In their study of children (5.5–7 years old) in South African townships, they showed that the children's literacy and numerical skills were very poorly developed. The authors speculate that this may be because of the relative lack of emphasis on literacy both in the larger culture (child rearing practices that do not facilitate parental involvement in literacy development) and in the family (little exposure to reading and writing experience in the home).

## ◆ ADOLESCENCE

### Formal Operational Thinking

Piaget's stage of formal operations also has been studied cross-culturally, and it is the view of some researchers that individuals in many societies never achieve this type of thinking. In fact, a study conducted among Nigerian adolescents by Hollos and Richards (1993), using Piagetian tasks, revealed little use of formal operational thinking.

One of several tasks frequently used to measure cognitive development in the stage of formal operations is the pendulum problem. In the pendulum problem, individuals are shown several pendulums of different weights that are attached to different lengths of string. When the pendulums are swung, individuals are asked to figure out what determines the speed at which the pendulums swing back and forth. For example, is it the weight, the height from which it is dropped, the force with which it is pushed, the string's length, or perhaps a combination of all of these? According to Inhelder and Piaget (1959), children in the stage of formal operations should be able to solve the pendulum problem through the process of elimination. Several cross-cultural studies have utilized this problem to observe cognitive changes in formal operations. For example, in studies carried out among adolescents in New Guinea, no subjects performed at the formal operational level (Kelly, 1977). Similarly, few adolescents showed formal operational thought when tested in Rwanda (Laurendeau-Bendavid, 1977). On the other hand, among Chinese children exposed to the British education system in Hong Kong, formal operational performance was found to be equal to or better than the

performance of American or European children (Goodnow & Bethon, 1966). Some formal operational thinking was also found among schoolchildren in Central Java and New South Wales (Philip & Kelly, 1974). Based on these and similar findings, Piaget (1972) proposed that development of formal operational thinking is influenced by experience as well as by culture (Rogoff & Chavajay, 1995). As we have seen before, events taking place within one's ecological niche frequently determine how one will perceive and behave in a particular ecological setting.

These examples provide added impetus for considering the ecological setting in understanding why behavior, including cognitive activity, is expressed as it is. For example, Cole and Cole (1996) point out that "a lawyer might think in a formal manner about law cases but not when sorting the laundry . . . a baseball manager might employ formal operational thinking to choose his batting lineup but [not when doing] . . . the combination-of-chemicals task" (p. 674). As evidence, they cite a study by Retschitzki (1989), showing that when African men and older boys play a popular board game, Baoule, involving the capture of seeds from opponents, they make use of complex rules, complicated offensive and defensive moves, and skilled calculations. Interviews with skilled Baoule players from Cote d'Ivoire revealed that their strategies in playing this game used the types of logical thinking we usually attribute to formal operations.

The inability to show evidence for the universality of formal operational thinking among adolescents and adults is not confined to non Western areas. In fact, earlier studies demonstrated that not all adolescents or adults living in Western technological cultures achieve this type of thinking, and that they frequently show low levels of success on formal operational tasks. Even earlier studies conducted by Kohlberg and Gilligan (1971) with subjects in late adolescence reported that only between 30 and 50 percent of such individuals perform successfully on formal operational tasks. Werner (1979) sums this up by stating, "Formal-operational thinking might not appear at all or might appear in less-generalized form among cultures and individuals whose experience is limited to one or a few specialized or technical occupations. In other words, survival in a particular culture may not call for, nor be influenced by, formal logical thinking. Thus formal thought processes are probably cultural alternatives that can be learned. Humans have the capacity for it, but may not have realized it in order to 'get by' in their particular society" (p. 224). For a review of fifty years of formal operational research, see Bond (1998).

Finally, in a discussion of the socialization of cognition, Goodnow (1990) concludes that Piagetian theory can be effectively applied to the conservation of weight, amount, and volume. However, she goes on to say that "if one's goal is to go beyond these domains—to construct an account of cognitive development that cuts across many domains or that takes place in everyday life—then classical Piagetian theory will certainly need some additions"

(pp. 277–278). This, of course, is a position with which we certainly agree and which we encourage other researchers to take into account when conducting future cross-cultural studies of cognition.

Formal and informal learning constitutes a large part of child and adolescent socialization. Formal learning environments are also designed to foster cognitive development. But, as we saw in some examples, young people who do not attend schools acquire mathematic and analytical skills through other means. So how important is formal schooling for cognitive development? A study compared schooled and unschooled children and adolescents in the African nation of Malawi on their performance on basic cognitive tasks and the Raven Colored Progressive Matrixes intelligence test (Van de Vijver & Brouwers, 2008). The results showed that children who had never attended school had no significant deficits in intelligence and basic information processing skills. Should these results serve as an excuse for adolescence to drop out of school because it does not make a difference anyway? We would discourage such an argument. Even though basic information processing and intelligence may not be enhanced by formal schooling, it still develops verbal abilities and other meta-cognitive skills, such as critical thinking and skill transfer to other domains. Did any of your peers drop out of school? Do you know what they are doing now? Did some return to get their diplomas?

## ◆ ADULTHOOD

### Reasoning and Decision Making

Most of the research in cross-cultural human development has emphasized cognitive growth in childhood and adolescence. By comparison, few cross-cultural studies have examined cognitive development in adulthood. Piaget believed that formal operational thinking represented the highest level of cognitive development and proposed no additional stages in adulthood. He believed that an adolescent and an adult would think in the same way. However, some developmental psychologists have challenged this belief, arguing for a post-formal stage of cognitive development in adulthood. For example, Labouvie-Vief (1986) has suggested that in early adulthood, a change in thinking occurs, in which individuals begin to recognize cognitive limitations and may adapt their thinking to the demands of their environment. This process is called **adaptive logic** and involves *balancing critical analyses of objective observations with one's subjective reactions to these observations*. For example, when performing a memory task, older subjects may make a conscious decision to exclude much of the detailed information they remember, believing it may be uninteresting to the researcher or to other listeners. If this is the case, Salthouse (1987) suggests that when measuring cognitive abilities of middle-aged adults, we need to employ strategies different than those used

with young adults (e.g., experience and expertise). This represents one more challenge for researchers interested in the study of cognitive development.

Another cognitive process that emerges in adulthood is what is called dialectical thinking. **Dialectical thinking** *suggests that for every viewpoint there is an opposing viewpoint and these two can be considered simultaneously.* The ability to synthesize and view opposing ideas holistically in order to resolve contradiction represents a new level of cognitive flexibility and a deepening of thought, which, in turn, facilitates developmental growth (Peng & Nisbett, 1999). Researchers have come to consider dialectical and analytical processes (acquired during the formal operational stage) as two coexisting systems that guide human reasoning and decision making (Frankish & Evans, 2009). Within individuals, one system might dominate their reasoning in general, but in a particular situation the dual processing of information may lead to conflicting conclusions (you may have heard people say something like: “I do not know whether to follow my mind, or my heart”). Can you think of situations in which you have faced similar dilemmas? How did you resolve them? Would you say it was difficult or easy?

While it is safe to assume that such basic cognitive processes are universal and develop in all healthy adults, there is also evidence that culture shapes the way these processes are used. In other words, depending on cultural influences, one person might reason analytically and another dialectically when solving a similar problem. For example, East Asians seem to process information more holistically than Europeans. That is, they attend to the object or event itself as well as the surrounding cues or situation. Westerners, in contrast, analyze the object or event, and pay little attention to the context (Nisbett, 2003). As a consequence, we also see cultural differences in how people explain, judge, and predict behavior. For example, East Asians tend to attribute the cause of another person’s behavior more readily to the situation whereas Europeans and North Americans think the person’s disposition or personality causes behavior. In the first instance, a person might fail a final exam because he sat in the back of the classroom and could not understand the teacher’s instruction. The person-centered explanation would attribute the person’s failure on his lack of intelligence (Norenzayan, 2006).

Some theorists argue that the emphasis on holistic thinking in eastern cultures has led to a more sophisticated way of dialectical thinking that is more adaptive to a changing environment than the dialectic process that is present in “Western” thinking (Buchtel & Norenzayan, 2009). Whether there is really a “higher form of dialectical thinking” that develops in response to cultural influences is up for debate (Ho, 2000), but considering the discussion in this chapter of ecological influences on cognition, we would argue, that this question is worth further exploration.

An initial step in this exploration may come from a study of adults in Sweden who had been adopted as children (between the ages of 0 and 9 years) from various countries (Odenstad, et al. 2008). The researchers found

that cognitive test performance was almost identical for all adult nonadoptees and those adoptees who had been adopted before the age of four. However, among adults who had been adopted after that age, there were marked differences between adopted and nonadopted individuals. Interestingly, South Korean adoptees had consistently higher scores than adoptees from other non-Western countries, and their scores were comparable to the nonadopted Swedish group. These group differences lead us to believe that there are some factors in the ecological system of these Korean adults that aided their cognitive development.

## ◆ LATE ADULTHOOD

As one gets older, one supposedly gets wiser. At middle age and late adulthood, one has greater experience, becomes more sensitive to inconsistencies, and responds differently to social, political, and economic changes. These are generally the years of greatest productivity and self-satisfaction in career, avocation, or family.

Studying and understanding cognition during the late adult years presents unique challenges, in part due to a confounding or intermingling of age and experience. Since the majority of research efforts have been conducted in Western cultures, which are youth oriented, the focus has tended to be on cognitive development among children and adolescents, not on the later years of adulthood. As a result, we still know relatively little about changes in cognitive abilities among adults and even less from a cross-cultural perspective.

### Intelligence and Cognitive Aging

In their efforts to investigate changes in cognitive development during middle and late adulthood, Horn and Cattell (1967) proposed a distinction between fluid and crystallized intelligence. **Fluid intelligence** involves *the ability to form concepts, reason abstractly, and apply material to new situations*. It is thought to be biological or intuitive and to be uninfluenced by culture. It is reflected in an individual's ability to make inferences, draw analogies, solve problems, and understand relationships among concepts. **Crystallized intelligence** refers to *an individual's accumulated knowledge and experience in a particular culture* (e.g., ability to react to social situations or respond to classroom tests).

Previous research in developmental psychology indicates that these two types of intelligence unfold in different directions. While fluid intelligence stays the same or declines somewhat throughout adulthood, crystallized intelligence may actually improve (Horn & Hofer, 1992; Lerner, 1990).

As researchers have begun to view cognitive aging in cultural contexts, they have challenged the traditional view that the changes in supposedly

“hard-wired” cognitive processes are truly a consequence of biological aging and, therefore, unaffected by culture (Park, Nisbett, & Hedden, 1999). If it is indeed true that Asians process information more contextually than Westerners, as we described in the previous section, Asians should be more responsive to contextual cues when performing memory tasks. This would enhance memory, when surrounding cues assist with memory, but detract from performance, when contextual cues are distracting or irrelevant. So, depending on the type of memory task that presents itself, Asian elderly may perform better or worse than their Western counterparts (Luszcz, 2006). This is an intriguing area worthy of further exploration.

Larger cultural influences are not the only mediating ecological factors in cognitive changes later in life. Social relationships, particularly spousal or partner relationships, play an important role as well. Gerstorff and associates (2009) followed married couples over a span of eleven years, and found interesting correlations between the cognitive functioning between partners. Specifically, husbands’ decline in processing speed and memory consistently predicted wives’ decline in those functions a year later. The reverse, however, was not the case. Why are wives more susceptible than husbands in being influenced by their partners’ decline? The authors offer two possible explanations: one, cognitively well-functioning husbands may have access to resources (financial or otherwise) that allow the couple to remain active and engaged in older age. Two, if the husband shows cognitive decline, the opportunities for his wife to engage in activities may be limited, as she takes care of him.

The common-sense belief “use it or lose it” also plays a role in the decline of cognitive performance in older age (Hertzog, 2009). First, people who develop a habit of actively seeking cognitively stimulating activities, reinforce their existing cognitive skills and even develop new ones. Second, how intensely a person engages in a cognitive task, determines how well he/she will perform. For example, older readers who pause during reading to reflect on what they read, will recall more of the contents. In short, making a habit of engaging frequently and consciously in daily cognitive tasks will contribute to intellectual vitality in later adulthood (Stine-Morrow, 2007). As is the case in other areas of development, macro- and microlevel ecological conditions interact with biological factors of cognitive aging.

An overall decline in “fluid intelligence” may be counteracted by applying accumulated experience (or crystallized intelligence). For example, Yang Tsu, an eighty-four-year-old master of martial arts in China, exhibits great discipline and patience (which took many years to cultivate), when teaching his young, impulsive apprentice, Low Chi Tho, who wants to learn everything very quickly. After some time, Low Chi has come to admire Yang Tsu and to realize the need to develop a more reflective approach to learning. In short, what might be negatively viewed by some cultures as a slowdown or decline in cognitive response is positively viewed in this case as a necessary quality for



*A martial arts instructor patiently teaches his young Chinese apprentice.*  
(© Michael K. Nichols/National Geographic Image Collection)

achieving success. Our familiarity with cross-cultural research suggests that there are many instances in which a behavior in one culture is viewed quite differently in another. This richness of differences (as well as similarities) provides many opportunities for those interested in pursuing the study of behavior from a cross-cultural, ecological, or sociocultural perspective.

The issue of accumulated experience over time has been associated with wisdom. But does age alone make an individual wiser? Not necessarily. Smith and Baltes (1990) investigated sixty German professionals and divided them into three age groups of twenty-five to thirty-five, forty to fifty, and sixty to eighty-one. Each group was presented with four made-up examples of demanding situations and was asked to prepare solutions for these problems. Their approaches and solutions were rated by a panel of human services professionals. Of the 240 respondents, eleven scored in the “wise” category but were not necessarily older. In fact, they were found in almost equal numbers in each of the three groups. Wisdom, then, would not appear to be characteristic of any particular age group. In short, individuals do not become wiser simply because they get older. Wisdom takes many forms and varies according to each culture’s orientation. In this study the criterion for determining what constituted wisdom was set by the researchers, who represent a specific cultural orientation that may or may not apply to all cultures. Replication of this study in a variety of other cultures might produce some interesting findings.



More recent research on this topic has led Baltes and his colleagues to propose several general characteristics associated with wisdom, including the ability to focus on important issues and to exercise good judgment, the development of a broad base of experiences, and recognition of one's wisdom by others (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Kunzmann & Baltes, 2003). In addition, Ardelt (2004) suggests that "wisdom-related knowledge has to be *realized* by an individual through a reflection on personal experiences to be called wisdom, and that the wisdom-related knowledge that is written down in texts remains theoretical or intellectual knowledge until a person retransforms it into wisdom. From this perspective, wisdom is a characteristic of people and not of texts" (p. 305).

In the final analysis, it is important to realize that although some aspects of cognitive functioning decline with age, how this change is viewed and evaluated depends largely on one's culture, ecological surroundings, and developmental niche. Do you have older relatives or friends? Have you noticed any specific declines in their cognitive functioning? What difficulties are they experiencing?

### **Language and Communication in Later Life**

Similar conclusions can be drawn with regard to language use and comprehension in later life. Undoubtedly, some actual changes occur in language with advancing age, particularly when there is a decline of cognitive functions, such as memory. For example, older speakers are a little slower and use different strategies in comprehending sentences, and they use less complex sentence structure. On the other hand, grammar, vocabulary, and speech production are relatively consistent across the lifespan. Despite these findings, there is the pervasive stereotype that older people are impaired in their communication. In a society in which aging is associated with negative expectations, older adults are confronted with physical changes of aging (e.g., hearing loss, voice quality, slowness of movement), and these are often interpreted by others as loss of competence. As a consequence, caregivers and others communicate with the older person in "elderspeak": simple words, short sentences, repetition, speaking slowly and in a higher pitch tone of voice (De Bot & Makoni, 2005). Some aspects of elderspeak (e.g., less complex sentence structure) make communication easier for older people. Other aspects (e.g., high pitch voice, slow speech) are often perceived as patronizing and may lead to diminished self-esteem, social withdrawal, and, ultimately, to a decline in communicative competence. Here, negative cultural expectations actually lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy. Consider, once again, the ecological systems approach. Although scientific evidence is lacking, it is conceivable that older adults in cultures that hold their elders in higher esteem will not experience the situation described above. Overall, researchers agree that good quality of interactions is important for the maintenance of language and cognitive skills (e.g., verbal fluency, word recall).

Just as cultural expectations differ in important ways, so do languages. Perhaps aging affects speakers of different languages in different ways.



Research on cross-language differences and aging is very sparse and is certainly an area open to further investigation. Kemper (1992) shares a few interesting observations. Some languages are very strict in their structure. For example, English has a fixed word order of subject-verb-object. Other languages, such as Russian and informally spoken Japanese, rely heavily on contextual cues and word order may vary. Kemper points out that the more “contextual” languages may make it easier for older people to comprehend and speak because they do not have to follow complex, strict language rules. This means that older adults who may have problems processing complex sentence structure can still understand and convey the meaning of a spoken sentence by interpreting the larger context.

## ◆ SUMMARY

**Cognition** is a general term referring to thinking, reasoning, decision making, remembering, categorizing, and problem solving. Cultural factors and beliefs found in the interaction among Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems, the developmental niche, and the sociocultural orientation contribute in a variety of ways to cognitive development across the lifespan.

The theories of Piaget, Vygotsky, and others provide a useful framework for conceptualizing cognitive growth and development and its relationship to language and culture. The linguistic relativity hypothesis states that different languages provide us with different frameworks within which we understand and communicate our experiences.

Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory emphasizes the strong influence of social and cultural factors on both cognitive and language development. He introduced the zone of proximal development, which refers to what a child is presently capable of doing and what he or she could potentially do if guided by adults or capable peers. Vygotsky argued that cognitive development is enhanced when instruction is focused on an individual’s potential rather than on the level of actual development. According to Vygotsky, the development of egocentric speech, inner speech, and external speech are grounded in one’s social and cultural orientation. Vygotsky also emphasized the need for guided instruction (scaffolding), in which adults provide assistance (scaffolds) for children as they attempt to solve difficult problems. Vygotsky’s view of language acquisition and sociocultural influences is mirrored in the learning of a second language. Along with a strong developmental influence, we have identified multiple ecological, social, and psychological factors that account for the successful learning of a second, nonnative language.

According to Piaget, children’s thinking differs significantly from that of adults, which is acquired only after successfully passing through a series of discrete stages. These stages have been studied from a cross-cultural perspective, and research evidence suggests that some aspects (the sequence of stages) may be universal, while others (the stage of formal operations) may not.

Cross-cultural investigations of human development have tended to focus primarily on children and adolescents and devote less attention to middle and late adulthood. At the same time, research in adult cognition has revealed that a fifth stage of cognitive development (post-formal thought) may emerge after formal operations. This new thinking allows an individual to move beyond abstract conceptualization and to integrate diverse reasoning abilities with pragmatic problem-solving strategies. The work of several researchers suggests that adult cognition is characterized by adaptive logic and dialectical thinking. The ability to synthesize new ideas and to realize that there are at least two sides to every point of view provides adults with more flexibility, effective problem-solving skills, and a broadening of thought.

Cognitive development in middle and late adulthood follows a different pattern than in childhood and adolescence. Horn and Cattell have suggested that a distinction be made between fluid and crystallized intelligence. Fluid intelligence is a person's ability to solve problems, think abstractly, and to apply new material in creative ways. Crystallized intelligence is learning that is based on experience. Early cross-cultural research indicates that as we get older, fluid intelligence declines, whereas crystallized intelligence increases. More recent research by Baltes and Schaie disputes this claim and suggests the need to consider cultural and contextual factors when attempting to explain individual differences in cognitive decline during late adulthood.

While some cognitive decline may influence communication in older age, other factors also influence language competence. Negative views of the elderly embedded in culture leading to perceived incompetence may be much more influential than actual loss of language competence. Moreover, changes in language competence in older age may be more or less relevant, depending on the characteristics of the language spoken.

### ◆ STUDY QUESTIONS

- How was the original linguistic-relativity hypothesis (Sapir and Whorf) revised, and how do they differ?
- Which developmental and ecological factors play a role in language acquisition and early second-language acquisition?
- Cross-cultural research testing Piaget's stages of cognitive development has shown that some aspects of the stage-theory describe universal patterns of development. What aspects of the developmental stages are seemingly universal?
- What are "fluid" and "crystallized" intelligence, and how do they develop and change with age?
- How does use of language and communication change in later life, and how might different ecological settings help people to adapt to those changes?

## ◆ FURTHER READINGS

J. Altarriba. (2000). Bilingualism: Language, memory, and applied issues. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture* Unit 4, Chapter 4 (<http://orpc.iaccp.org>) International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology.

Bilingualism, or the knowledge of more than one language, is prevalent throughout the world. However, much of the cognitive literature on language processing and memory retrieval has included participants who are monolingual speakers. This online chapter introduces the ways in which bilingualism has been investigated in the areas of autobiographical memory, memory recall, and communication in applied settings, and offers suggestions for further research.

S. H. Elgin. (2000). *The Language Imperative*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books.

In a conversational style, this book addresses many issues of culture and language. It discusses the linguistic relativity hypothesis, debates about multilingualism, and the power of language in different social and cultural contexts (business, family, medicine, and religion).

Sandra G. Kouritzin. (1999). *Face(t)s of First Language Loss*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

This book contributes to the understanding of first language loss in both immigrant and indigenous communities by providing insight into the process of first language loss and the factors contributing to it; defining from an insider perspective, what it means to “lose” a language; and analyzing the perceived consequences of first language loss in terms of social, academic, emotional, and economic factors. Five different story tellers relate the histories of their first language while learning English.

John Korte. (1995). *White Gloves: How We Create Ourselves Through Memory*. New York: Free Press.

Drawing on research on cognition and clinical psychology, the author, in an intriguing, readable, and jargon-free manner, illustrates the nature of memory from childhood to old age, including first memories, photographic memories, memories of dreams, and repressed memory.

Barbara Rogoff. (1990). *Apprenticeship in Thinking*. New York: Oxford University Press.

This book overflows with examples of parents leading their children through rough and calm cognitive seas to new levels of thinking. Illustrations of daily activities performed in scores of cultures fill almost every page of this book, which was written by one of the most prominent proponents of the cultural context perspective.

## ◆ DEVELOPMENTAL ANALYSIS

### CULTURE, LANGUAGE, AND COGNITION

My name is Matilda Skelton, but everyone—thankfully—calls me “Maddi.” I was born on September 17, 1938, in Elfville, Pennsylvania, a small farming  
(continued)

community settled by Irish immigrants (population 1734). I have often reflected on the differences between my own upbringing and that of my children. While there are similarities, there are also some striking contrasts—particularly related to language acquisition. I grew up in a predominantly Irish, Catholic community. We all shopped at the same grocery store, attended the same church, and spoke the same language—English. I learned to speak while at home with my mother and honed my language skills when I entered kindergarten. My peers and I all exhibited an ability to sound words out according to the arrangement of letters. Once I had acquired this skill, I felt as if I had gained magical powers! I remember trying to teach my younger sister to speak shortly after she was born. It was extremely frustrating to me that this new little person (who had invaded *my* home) could not even talk.

It was not until I struggled through Latin in the eighth grade that I was exposed to another language. Staring at the letters on the page, I was trying to make sense out of these new patterns—and it did not come easily to me. Sure, I could sound out some of these words (often incorrectly), but what did it all mean? After barely passing the first term's exam, I vowed to stay away from foreign languages. I kept my vow until I ventured off to study in Italy during my junior year in college. I met many people who spoke three, four, and five languages. Quite impressive compared to my one. Fortunately for me, English was often one of the languages spoken!

I began taking Italian language classes shortly after I returned from my study abroad program. It was not easy for me. But, I continued learning throughout the courtship with my Italian-born husband, Giorgio. It certainly came in handy when I met my future in-laws for the first time! Between savory mouthfuls of wonderful Italian food, I could effortlessly tell my mother-in-law how delicious her manicotti was. Benissimo!

Giorgio and I made the decision to raise our children in a bilingual environment by exposing them to both English and Italian. Regardless of whether a true "critical period" for language acquisition existed, we both agreed that as children, it would be best for them to learn Italian along with English. Therefore, Giorgio and I spoke both Italian and English in the home. When my mother-in-law came to visit us from Italy, she spoke only Italian. Both of our children now speak Italian fluently and have gone on to learn other languages as well. They thank Giorgio and me for our efforts to raise them in a bilingual environment. They often marvel at how Giorgio and I knew what to do as parents. I tell them that while we had some basic idea of what we were doing, much of our parenting was based on the experiences we had as we went along. Each experience helped us to shape our knowledge and parenting approach. Although I think we did a fine job, I often wonder if we could have done better knowing what we know now. I guess that is consistent with the idea that "older is wiser." I definitely feel as if I am *wiser* today—fortunately I do not feel much older!



## CULTURE, SELF, AND PERSONALITY

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*Sergej was happy, agreeable, and easy to care for as a child. He grew up on a kolkhozy (collective farm) in the Ukraine, one of the fifteen republics in the former Soviet Union. Sergej was quiet, and even his adolescent years were not characterized by the confusion and psychological turmoil experienced by so many young people. Sergej did well in school, completed an apprenticeship, and, following the breakup of the Soviet Union, now works on his family's small farm. He has been married for several years, and his wife, Tamara, describes him as a "good husband" who works hard, stays at home, and cares for his family.*



*Yuen, born in Guizhou province in south central China, was what her mother considered a difficult child. Her moods were unpredictable, and when upset she took a long time to calm down. Yuen never developed a regular sleeping and feeding schedule, making it difficult for her mother to coordinate her work and child care. Her adolescent years were equally challenging. Yuen had few friends and struggled with discipline problems at school. Now in her mid-thirties, she has assumed a leadership position in her work. Occasionally, she has to be reprimanded for her creative and sometimes radical ideas.*



Sergej and Yuen clearly are very different people and showed very distinct character traits as children and as adults. Were they born with different personalities? Are these differences due to innate cultural patterns of personality? How much do cultural expectations about the course of one's life influence adult personality? We address these and other questions in this chapter by examining issues of personality, self, and individual differences and their embeddedness in a cultural context.

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## ◆ ECOLOGICAL CONTEXT: TEMPERAMENT, PERSONALITY, AND SELF

### Temperament and Heritability of Traits

Many of the childhood behaviors exhibited by Sergej and Yuen can be explained according to differences in **temperament**, or *a person's innate characteristic behavioral style or typical pattern of responding to events in the environment*. Individual differences in temperament can be observed in the earliest hours following birth. For example, while some newborns and infants are irritable and cry frequently, others appear to be good-natured and calm. During the first few months of life, some infants are extremely expressive and react to people and events by making sounds and waving their arms; others are less active, may hardly respond to their environment, and appear withdrawn and uninvolved. Frequently, the differences we see in temperament among infants tend to be characteristically consistent throughout individual lives. In fact, some researchers maintain that infant temperament reliably predicts adult personality.

**Personality** can be described as a *unique system of identifiable, characteristic behavioral patterns that distinguish a person from others*. The infant who is shy and anxious around strangers is more likely to be a shy adult than is an infant who curiously approaches strangers. The potentially powerful relationship between infant temperament and adult personality has led many researchers to the conclusion that traits of temperament are, to a significant extent, inherited. They argue that environment and socialization can influence temperament only within the limits initially defined by heredity.

The concept of heritability of temperament has received support from careful studies of twins (identical and fraternal) reared together and apart (DiLalla & Jones, 2000). These studies are based on the hypothesis that identical twins share 100 percent of their genes and, therefore, should be identical in their temperamental dispositions at birth. In contrast, fraternal twins, like other siblings, share only 50 percent of their genetic makeup and, therefore, should be less similar in their temperament. Yet, like identical twins, they share a very similar environment. Studies such as these should be able to provide answers to such questions as the following: (1) Are identical twins more similar in their temperament than fraternal twins? (2) Are identical twins raised in different environments more similar in temperament than are fraternal twins reared together? (3) Are fraternal twins (who share half of their genes) more similar to each other than are adopted siblings (who do not share any genes)?

If the answer to all of these questions is “yes,” we can conclude that genetic disposition, rather than environment, is responsible for the differences in temperament observed among people. However, to accurately assess the results of twin studies, it is important to understand the way

heritability is measured. In general, the degree of heritability is expressed by the **heritability quotient**, which is *an estimate of the percentage of the variability in a given trait that can be attributed to genetic differences*. For example, a heritability quotient of 50 percent, for trait X means that approximately half of the variation, or individual difference, found in a sample is due to genetic differences among those subjects in the sample. The remaining half of the variation is assumed to be the result of complex environmental factors or, possibly, unexplained errors in measurement. With this in mind, let us consider some twin research and what it tells us about the inheritability of temperament.

In general, twin studies have produced moderately high heritability quotients. For example, a study of 250 Canadian twins showed broad genetic influence on the five dimensions of neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. The genetic contribution to trait variation was estimated at 41 percent, 53 percent, 61 percent, 41 percent, and 44 percent, respectively (Jang, Livesy, & Vernon, 1996). Similarly, a study of 350 twins in Minnesota revealed that approximately 40 percent of variability among subjects in such traits as stress reaction (related to neuroticism and general anxiousness) and aggression could be attributed to genetics (Bouchard, Lykken, McGue, Segal, & Tellegen, 1990).

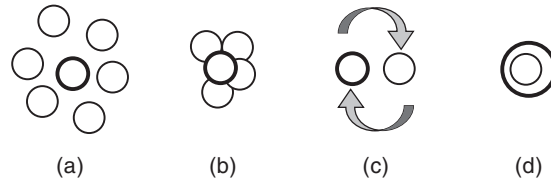
While results like these suggest that certain temperamental traits are genetically transmitted, they also suggest that in specific instances other traits are heavily influenced by socialization within the family environment. After all, a heritability quotient of 40 to 50 percent also means that 50 to 60 percent of variation is due to environmental rather than genetic factors. The debate around environmental and genetic influences on temperament continues, and researchers are not yet able to provide a definitive answer as to which plays the more significant role in determining differences in temperament and personality.

### The Self: Some Cultural Perspectives

Our unique system of behavioral patterns, or personality, develops over time, shaped by the interaction between temperament (heritable traits) and the ecological system. As personality develops, it helps lay the foundation for development of the **self-concept**—*the perception of oneself as a person with identifiable behavioral patterns and characteristics, directed by desires, preferences, attributes, and abilities*. The unique structure and content of the self-concept, as well as some of the psychological dynamics related to it, are largely influenced by one's developmental niche and ecological systems (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, or macrosystem) in which one finds oneself at a particular time in the lifespan.

Those who write most frequently about the topic of self-concept tend to discuss cultural variations in relation to the dimension of individualism-





**FIGURE 1** Independent, Interdependent, Relational, and Encompassing Concepts of the Self

Source: Adapted from M. F. Mascolo, G. Misra, and C. Rapisardi, "Individual and Relational Conceptions of Self-Experience in India and the U.S." in M. F. Mascolo and J. Li (Eds.), *Cultural and Developing Selves: Beyond Dichotomization*, 2004, pp. 9–26. New Directions in Child and Adolescent Development Series. W. Damon (Series Ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

collectivism. Triandis (1989), who has written extensively about individualism-collectivism, suggests that culture-specific views of the self result from early exposure to differing values and beliefs. For example, childrearing patterns in collectivist cultures tend to introduce and reinforce the welfare of the collective over the welfare of the individual. In contrast, parents in individualistic cultures teach their children that the individual's primary goal is independence and the establishment of a unique self. Based on these fundamentally different approaches, it seems logical that individuals in collectivist and individualistic cultures should vary in how they view themselves. Some authors make a distinction between interdependent and independent selves (Gardiner & Mutter, 1994; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Figure 1 depicts various conceptions of self as they may exist within a given culture and across many cultures. The individualistic/independent self-concept (a) remains relatively stable and consistent because interrelations with others are not defining elements of one's identity. This is represented in the figure as a heavier circle that does not contact other individuals that surround the person.

The interdependent/collectivistic conception of self (b) is defined by the individual's relationship with individuals who are significant in that person's life. The heavier circle of self touches each individual illustrating the situational flexibility of the self-concept: The self must change if relationships change. These models of self are based on older work by Markus and Kitayama (1991) and Gardiner and Mutter (1994). The more recent findings we described above led Mascolo, Misra, and Rapisardi (2004) to propose two additional conceptions of self that could account for the coexistence of independent and interdependent elements within a person's self. In the relational understanding of self (c), self and other are neither entirely independent nor interdependent. Rather, aspects of the distinct self are defined in mutual relations with others. For example, self-characteristics such as hostile,



friendly, or gregarious can only be derived from relationships with others. How would one be gregarious by oneself? Finally, with the “encompassing” sense of self (d), Mascolo and colleagues account for a self that derives from relationships that are unequal in social status. Such relationships define one person as responsible, protective, and caring for the other person. In turn, the “subordinate” person sees himself as obedient, respectful, and appreciative. This type of self-experience may occur in parent–child relationships, and, in many cultures, between husband and wife or siblings. One would also find it in very hierarchically structured groups, such as the military or in organized religion.

While the concepts of individualism and collectivism may be useful in describing general differences among cultures, critics point out that they disregard within-culture differences and neglect the fact that any culture includes both individualistic and collectivistic beliefs, values, and motives (Turiel, 2004). Applied to the concept of self, this means that a person’s self can contain individualistic and collectivistic elements at the same time. In fact, one of the students was concerned that she should be relegated to an “individualistic” concept of self just because she grew up in an individualistic culture. For example, she argued convincingly that some aspects of her self-concept and the belief that she is a “good” person are tied to her charity work and helping others. Research confirms this more complex understanding of self. Raeff (2004) reports that late adolescents recognize themselves in relation to others. When asked to describe themselves, most adolescents in Raeff’s European American sample did use autonomous terms (e.g., I am insightful, I am athletic, I like to read). However, when they were prompted to explain why these self-characteristics are important, the answers revealed a clear connection between self-characteristics and social relationships. For example, one woman pointed out that being insightful “. . . is very important because communication’s obviously a very important thing. . . . You know, and sometimes it’s nice to have insight into what somebody else is thinking and feeling” (Raeff, 2004, p. 73). Equally poignant are Li and Yue’s (2004) findings that Chinese adolescents can show strong individual goals and ambitions in the realm of learning, despite the generally more collectivistic values present in Chinese culture. How do you view yourself—as an individualist, collectivist, or a mixture of the two? What about other members of your family and your friends?

The ecological model is a useful tool in interpreting these findings. Viewed from this perspective, individual and collective orientations of self can coexist at different levels of the ecological model. Box 1 highlights several cultures that have a body of research focused on the concept of the self in relation to cultural values and beliefs—Japan, China, and India.

**BOX 1**
**THE SELF AND PERSONALITY:  
SOME CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES**
**Japan**

Japan is considered to be a collective culture, where the Japanese place the group above the individual and tend to be other-directed. The Japanese are extremely sensitive to and concerned about relationships and maintaining harmony (an influence from Confucianism) and stress such values as filial piety, shame (as a method of reinforcing expectations and proper behavior), self-control, emphasis on consensus, and fatalism.

The Japanese view the self as consisting of two parts—the inner self and the outer self, also known as the social self (what is typically shown to others). At the core of the inner self is the *kokoro*, a reservoir of truthfulness and purity that remains private and is not shared with outsiders. Interestingly, the Japanese describe the self in concrete terms that are more contextual and relational than individuals in the United States. For example, while an American may say, “I am shy” (an abstract definition), a Japanese is more likely to say, “I am shy at work” (a contextual definition) or “I am shy with strangers” (a relational definition).

In addition, Japanese behavior often avoids direct communication and careful control over emotions and actions, allowing for the masking of feelings and the appearance of extreme modesty or shyness. The downplaying of one’s performance may result in a nonthreatening atmosphere in which no one feels threatened, but the modesty displayed does not mean the person is not confident or he or she is shy. The individual may be extremely confident but, according to cultural expectations, is not to behave in an outwardly confident manner. Finally, the Japanese tend to be less unrealistically optimistic than Americans. Unrealistic optimism is the tendency for people to believe that, compared to others, they are more likely to experience positive events and less likely to experience negative events. The Japanese are believed to be less unrealistically optimistic, because the attention to the individual that self-enhancement engenders is not valued in Japanese culture.

**China**

An interest in understanding personality and the self is not new for the Chinese. An ancient theory held that personality is a result of the interaction of two forces—*yin* (passive, weak, and destructive) and *yang* (active, strong, and constructive)—and the Five Agents or *Wu-using* (metal, wood, water, fire, and earth), each of which has corresponding physical and temperamental characteristics. All of this is mediated by the Confucian Doctrine of the

**BOX 1** CONTINUED

Mean, which states that there should be a balance of these forces and an avoidance of one-sidedness or extremity to maintain the Mean (moderation). This balance results in all things being in their proper order and thriving. If there is a balance, then the person is active or passive *according to the situation*. If the Doctrine of the Mean is violated, then the person is either extremely passive or extremely active.

A more modern Chinese theory of personality centers on Chinese social orientation or a person's tendency and desire to maintain harmonious relationships with others. An example is dedication to the family that results in Chinese merging their sense of self with the family and not focusing on personal interests, desires, or goals.

Beliefs about personality and the self are also influenced by Confucianism. Confucian personality is viewed as "the becoming process" and not an attained state of being. There is no fixed personality; rather, it is constantly evolving. A person becomes a personality by embodying a life worth living. At the same time, there is a belief in a "boundless" self, and the Chinese see the self as part of a larger vision of the universe.

Finally, while the Chinese focus greater attention on the inner self than individuals in Western cultures, their self-presentation is similar to the Japanese. In other words, the Chinese downplay their successes, engage in self-effacement, are less likely to demonstrate self-serving bias, and mask their feelings in social interactions.

**India**

India is predominantly Hindu, with large minorities of Sikhs and Muslims. To understand India's views on the self, an awareness and understanding of Hinduism is extremely helpful. Hinduism is multifaceted and encompasses a body of beliefs, philosophies, worship practices, and a code of conduct. According to Hinduism, all individuals have four basic aims in life that form the basis of Indian values: (1) *kama*, pleasure or enjoyment; (2) *artha*, wealth or success; (3) *dharma*, righteousness, faithful duty or code of conduct; and (4) *moksha*, liberation or salvation. Of these, dharma is the most relevant for the concept of self, because it deals with righteousness, faithful duty, or the code of conduct. In India rights and duties are defined separately for various segments of the society divided by age and social category (i.e., caste). In fact, the primary term for personhood has been *purusa*, meaning *man*, and the term conveys the privileged status of men.

The Indian view of the self is also related to the "Law of Karma," the guiding principle that assumes lawfulness and order in the physical, biological, mental, and moral realms. According to the law, each person must face

(continued)

**BOX 1 CONTINUED**

the appropriate consequences for his or her actions regardless of whether the actions are good, bad, or indifferent. Because India, like many other Asian cultures, is generally a collective society, individuals are not identified by individual traits, but instead are described in terms of social relationships. Responsiveness to the needs of others is viewed as a high moral obligation.

*Source:* Adapted from *Personality, the Self, and Culture* by Vicki Ritts, 2001, unpublished manuscript, St. Louis Community College. Reprinted by permission.

**◆ INFANCY**

As of today, researchers have not found a definite answer to the question “what influences a person’s personality more, temperament or socio-cultural factors?” Consequently, most recognize the existence of an intricate relationship between individual temperament and the sociocultural environment. In this section, we will discuss some theoretical perspectives that attempt to explain that relationship and how it shapes personality development early in life.

**Temperament, Ecological Systems, and the Developmental Niche**

A child’s developmental environment consists of four basic subsystems: (1) the microsystem, consisting of interactions between the child and her immediate environment (e.g., home or day care center); (2) the mesosystem, made up of individual microsystems (e.g., family and preschool); (3) the exosystem, consisting of influential social settings (e.g., parents’ place of work); and (4) the macrosystem, consisting of customs, values, and laws important to the child’s culture. Together, these subsystems provide the individual child with her developmental niche, or unique combination of socialization experiences. Each of these subsystems is influenced by, and in turn influences, a child’s individual temperament. A child’s behavior will initiate a specific response from a caretaker in a particular setting (home or preschool). However, these responses differ from one environmental setting to another. For example, a mother’s reaction to a child who exhibits irregular sleep and eating patterns differs from North America to East Africa. A North American mother typically pays more attention to an infant who is unpredictable in eating and sleeping patterns, and she arranges her schedule to take care of the child’s needs. In contrast, Super and Harkness (1994a) report that mothers in Kokwet, a small farming town in Kenya, interact more with children who operate on a regular daily schedule. Knowing when her baby will be awake

and alert, the mother can more easily arrange her many other duties and activities. Kokwet infants who are less predictable in their daily patterns are more often left to the care of an older sister or another caretaker.

This example illustrates how a child's temperament influences the environment. At the same time, however, specific patterns of response exhibited by others in the child's environment may facilitate or inhibit particular behavioral styles on the part of the child, thus making the child-environment relationship a two-way interaction. A fussy child receives more attention from the primary caretaker in most Western cultures, thus potentially rewarding and facilitating the child's dependency on the caretaker. In non-Western cultures, dependency and emotional attachment to the mother are often less pronounced, because mothers may not be available to respond with immediate emotional attention to fussy children.

### Temperament and "Goodness of Fit"

Another theoretical explanation that contributes considerably to the understanding of how temperament, development, and culture relate to one another is that of **goodness of fit**—*the quality of the adaptation, or "match," between a child's temperament and the demands of his immediate environment*. This concept was introduced by Thomas and Chess (1977) in an elaborate longitudinal study of children's temperament that eventually included a wide range of environmental factors. The researchers began by interviewing and observing middle-class families of European background living in New York. They were able to identify clusters of traits that characterized three different temperament types among infants: (1) the "easy" child, (2) the "difficult" child, and (3) the "slow-to-warm-up" child.

An **easy child** was characterized by a good mood, regular sleeping and eating cycles, and general calmness. Mothers considered these babies unproblematic and easy to raise. On the other hand, temperament traits of a **difficult child** included a negative mood, slow adaptation to and withdrawal from new experiences and people, irregular sleep and feeding patterns, and high emotional intensity. Moreover, these "difficult" infants were found in later childhood to be less well adjusted and prone to more behavioral problems. A **slow-to-warm-up child** generally showed few intense reactions, positive or negative, and tended to be mild and low in activity level. Thomas and Chess assert that it is not the individual child's temperament itself that is related to future maladjustment, but rather the match or mismatch of the child's temperament with the environment that predicts problematic behavior. If "difficult" temperament disrupts family routine and leads to negative parental reactions, negative developmental outcome is likely.

A follow-up study by Korn and Gannon (1983) with Puerto Rican families in New York provided additional support for the goodness-of-fit concept but sounded a note of caution as well. For example, early "difficult" tempera-

ment did not predict poor adjustment and behavioral difficulties in later childhood. The researchers point out that in these families, characteristics that were originally classified as “difficult” were not perceived as necessarily problematic and therefore did not disrupt family life or evoke negative parental reactions toward the child. These studies and others provide convincing evidence that culture is a critical determinant of the “goodness of fit” between an individual child (temperament) and her environment.

DeVries (1994) and DeVries and Sameroff (1984) further illustrate this concept by describing two individual cases encountered in the study of infants from different parts of Kenya. The case of Hamadi, a Digo boy, demonstrates how an “easy” temperament can lead to poor adjustment due to a mismatch between the boy’s temperament and his environment. For example, as an infant, Hamadi was energetic and active and exhibited healthy approach tendencies. He was described as one of the most advanced infants in the entire study. However, after starting school, Hamadi began to withdraw, became shy, and showed clear signs of distress through acting-out behavior.

What caused this transition? The researchers interviewed Hamadi’s parents and teachers and were told that Hamadi’s temperament did not fit with the cultural expectations of how a Digo boy his age should behave. The efforts of teachers and parents to control his energetic temperament and discourage his curiosity, instead of rewarding his enthusiasm and challenging his intellect, led Hamadi to withdraw and become angry and fearful.



*Differences in infant temperament can often be observed side-by-side within the same cultural context.*

(© Gary Buss/Getty images)

The second case reported by DeVries introduces Enkeri, a Masai boy born in the same year as Hamadi. According to traditional temperament measures, Enkeri scored as “difficult.” He was the classic “fussy” child—very intense, persistent, overactive, irregular in his daily behavior patterns, and not easily distracted or consolable. In a Western culture, these temperament traits would place Enkeri at risk for future adjustment problems. However, the behaviors that Western mothers dislike and describe as undesirable and difficult are valued highly in Masai society.

The Masai are an agricultural society and often have to struggle for survival in an extremely hostile environment. In times of drought, when herds of cattle and goats are destroyed, infant mortality is high because families cannot rely on the usual supply of milk. Under these kinds of conditions, infants who show “difficult” behavior tend to survive at a higher rate than infants who are quiet and undemanding. Why? Because infants who cry are fed and attended to, whereas those who don’t are assumed to be content. Consequently, infants who cry a lot are fed more and are in better physical condition, which contributes to their survival.

Finally, Meijer, Super, and Harkness (1997) attempted to further clarify the nature of “goodness of fit” and find a systematic relationship between maternal judgments of “difficult” and specific dimensions of child behavior. In a comparative study of mothers in Bloemenheim, Holland, and towns near Cambridge, Massachusetts, the researchers reported that parents in the two different cultural settings systematically interpreted the causes of difficult behavior differently. For example, while more American parents viewed difficulty as inherent in a child, more Dutch parents viewed it as a result of environmental factors. Clearly, the interaction of culture and individuality are different in these two ecological settings, and the resulting behavior and the interpretation of it are strongly influenced by the presence of different developmental niches.

Canadian researcher J. Phillippe Rushton (1998) pursues the “goodness of fit” hypothesis even further and in a very controversial direction. He argues that there are consistent “racial” differences in temperament that result from the unique survival challenges diverse groups of humans faced during evolutionary history. In particular, Rushton focuses on three categories of humans described as Mongoloid (Asian), Caucasoid (European), and Negroid (African). He argues that his research supports differences between these three groups in activity level, aggressiveness, cautiousness, dominance, impulsivity, and sociability. Rushton hypothesizes that the farther the populations migrated out of Africa, the more their temperament evolved over time to fit the survival challenges these populations faced. For example, the populations migrating north (Caucasoid and Mongoloid) spent long cold winters in closely knit social groups, requiring social cooperation and impulse control. Over time, these positive temperament traits (goodness of fit in these ecological settings) were passed on and became part of the “racial” temperament



characteristics. While this perspective accounts for neither individual differences nor cultural influences and socialization, it does illustrate the principle of the “goodness-of-fit” idea and is, thus, worth mentioning.

## ◆ CHILDHOOD

### The Emerging Self-Concept

If you were asked to draw a picture of yourself, what would your picture look like? Would it show a single figure in the middle of the page? Would you attempt to portray your most typical features (e.g., hairstyle, clothes, facial features)? Or, would you show yourself at work, at home, with friends, or with family? The way we think about ourselves, as individual entities or in a social context, is influenced by the cultural understanding of who a person is and what characterizes him or her.

In a cross-cultural study of self-concept in Japan and the United States, Cousins (1989) reported that subjects differed in the way they described themselves as individuals. Cousins used the Twenty Statements Test, which asks individuals to write twenty responses to the question “Who am I?” Results indicated that Americans used more psychological attributes, such as traits or dispositions, to describe themselves. In contrast, Japanese subjects frequently included the larger context when describing who they were. For example, Japanese subjects used more preferences and wishes, social categories, and activities in their self-descriptions.

Interestingly, the results from this study support several of the major themes, including “a cross-cultural perspective,” “an ecological model,” and “the developmental niche.” For example, in terms of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model, Americans can be said to view the self as part of the microsystem. The individual selects characteristics derived from early interactions between the child and the immediate environment, most notably the family. This conception reflects the individualistic nature of the American culture. The Japanese, on the other hand, select characteristics that emerge from interactions in social settings or institutions—that is, in the exosystem or even the macrosystem—where they have come into contact with the customs, values, and laws of their culture. Such behavior reflects a collectivist society. This contrast can be seen in the examples of Sergej and Yuen in the opening vignettes of this chapter.

In another study using the same methodology (the Twenty Statement Test), Bochner (1994) reported similar results when comparing adults from Malaysia (a collectivist culture) with adults from Australia and Britain (individualist cultures). Interestingly, unlike Cousins’s study cited earlier, Malaysians gave more responses referring to personal traits and dispositions than responses associated with social groups, and members of the two other cultures (Australia and Britain) gave more socially oriented responses. However,



overall Bochner's cross-cultural comparison showed significantly fewer personal responses and significantly more group-related responses among Malaysians than in either the Australian or British samples.

Miller (1984) suggested that these differences are developmental in nature (another theme weaving through our topical discussions). He compared adults in North America and Hindus in India. The results seem to replicate other findings: Indians attributed their actions more to contextual factors, whereas Americans explained actions in terms of personal dispositions. On the other hand, self-descriptions among young American and Hindu children (eight to eleven years of age) did not differ in any significant way; both groups referred more to context than to personal characteristics. This suggests that Americans, with age, may learn to focus more on the person than on the context when perceiving and evaluating behavior. This also casts some doubt on the definition of the individualism-collectivism dichotomy and its effect on actual behavior (in this case, self description). After all, it would be naïve to assume that cultural effects on self-concept and behavior could be reduced to two distinct categories of cultural values. This might be an interesting area for future research.

Additional evidence for the early influence of culture comes from a study conducted in the Netherlands (Van den Heuvel, Tellegen, & Koomen, 1992). Moroccan, Turkish, and Dutch children in grades six through eight were asked to describe five things about themselves, about one classmate who is like them, and about one classmate who is different from them. As hypothesized by the researchers, children from the two more collectivist cultures (Morocco and Turkey) used more social statements indicating group memberships, social activities, or clearly interpersonal traits (e.g., friendly toward others) when describing themselves or a similar classmate. Dutch children used significantly more psychological attributes, such as traits and personal preferences, in their description of themselves or a similar classmate. The authors conclude that the significant psychological differences found between individuals with an individualistic cultural background and those with a collectivistic background emerge at an early age and continue to develop across the lifespan.

Development of self-concept is greatly aided by language development and the words we use to describe ourselves. Pronouns such as *me*, *mine*, *you*, *us*, and *them* distinguish between self and others. Through the use of such words, we learn to understand ourselves as unique and different from others. In an early study, Mead (1934) suggested that personal names were at the center of self-concept development. Personal names help identify the self and distinguish oneself from others who are not referred to by that name. In many cultures in which names are carefully selected for their meaning, the person is thought to adopt characteristics associated with that name. These attributes become part of their self-concept. How often have we met someone with the same name as someone else we know and compared the characteristics of the two individuals?

### Self-Esteem and Self-Efficacy

A recurring question in the study of self-concept is whether we can and should separate how we *think* about ourselves from how we *feel* about ourselves. Some contend that the content of the self-concept and its evaluation, which results in self-esteem, are virtually inseparable. However, other self-concept research increasingly demonstrates that self-esteem may indeed be a distinct aspect of self-concept. From a developmental perspective, Harter (1982) has shown that a global sense of self-esteem (perceived self-worth), distinguishable from the descriptive aspects of self, emerges around the age of eight.

Watkins and Dhawan (1989) argue that the distinction or lack of distinction between self-esteem and self-concept may be a cultural phenomenon. In several studies, these investigators examined aspects of the self-concept and self-esteem of children and adults from diverse cultural groups. As before, they found distinct differences between members of Western and Asian cultures. For example, Dhawan and Roseman (1988) reported that 62 percent of responses of American young adults were classified as self-evaluations, compared with 35 percent of responses among Indians of the same age group. In addition, most of the self-evaluations made by Western subjects were positive rather than negative.

These results, along with others, suggest that the distinction between self-concept and self-evaluation is more pronounced in Asian cultures, whereas both aspects of self are intertwined in Western cultures. Once again, the explanation seems to lie in the individualistic or collectivistic orientation of the cultures involved. If an individual is independent and responsible for her success or failure, a focus on specific positive aspects of the self is an efficient protection against low self-esteem (Gardiner & Mutter, 1994). In contrast, in cultures in which individual success and enhancement are less important, personal attributes and accomplishments are not an immediate source of self-esteem and their value need not be emphasized.

As we noted previously, particularly in our discussion of the developmental niche and the ecological systems approach, childrearing practices and family environment are major contributors to cultural differences. These factors are also believed to be very influential in the development of personality and self-esteem, especially during the first years of life. Therefore, the fact that cultural differences in self-esteem are related to cultural differences in childrearing should not be surprising. Childrearing that emphasizes warmth and acceptance, together with consistent rules and achievement expectations, is clearly related to high self-esteem. For example, Olowu (1990) argues that many African children have higher self-esteem than children in Western countries because they enjoy the warmth and acceptance of an extended family. Such parental warmth can be provided by aunts and uncles as well as by grandparents. Western children, on the other hand, frequently rely on one or two caretakers for their self-esteem needs.



*In Burkina Faso, a senior Lobi man shows warmth and affection toward a young friend.*  
(© Bertrand Rieger)

Akande (1999) comes to a similar conclusion after studying the self-esteem in post-apartheid black South African children. He points out that at the core of South African self-esteem is the social group (most notably, the family) that promotes personal achievement, good character (“iwa pele”) influence, prestige, and hegemony.

Social psychologists recently have argued that we cannot understand a person’s self by only considering the general sense of ourselves as a person distinct from another person (self-concept) and our general sense of self-worth (self-esteem). Bandura (1997) explores the construct of “self-efficacy” as an important factor in the development of self. **Self-efficacy** refers to *the general sense of one’s ability to master tasks and to direct one’s behavior toward a goal*. Although highly correlated with self-esteem (Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2002), self-efficacy adds important insights to our understanding of the developing self.

According to Bandura, self-efficacy, unlike self-esteem, influences personal goals and behavior. When children learn that they can influence their

environment through their behavior, and they succeed in doing so, they develop a sense of efficacy. This sense of capabilities allows and motivates them to set goals and achieve them. As their world and their ecological systems expand, from family to peers to school, they develop self-efficacy in different domains. For example, Bandura's Children-Perceived Self-Efficacy scales, or CPSE, (Bandura 1990) measure self-efficacy in three domains: academic self-efficacy (capable to manage one's learning and master academic subjects), social self-efficacy (capable to form and maintain social relationships and manage conflicts), and self-regulatory efficacy (capable to resist social pressure).

In a study involving ten- to fifteen-year-old Italian, Hungarian, and Polish children, Pastorelli and her colleagues (2001) showed that some national differences in academic and social efficacy exist. For example, Hungarian children were more confident in their ability to master academic subjects but had a lower sense of being able to take charge of their learning than Italians and Poles. The authors point to the differences in educational practices in the different countries. They suggest that students may develop high efficacy in subject mastery in an educational system that is highly structured and tightly controlled by teachers and parents. On the other hand, these students may perceive a lack of control in choosing and directing their own learning activities. Likewise, the explanation for the tendency of Italian children in this study to perceive themselves as more capable in the social domain than both Hungarian and Polish children may lie in the ecological system. The family exerts the earliest influence in a child's life and provides early opportunities to develop social efficacy. Italian culture is known for its emphasis on strong family relationships throughout life, so it might not be surprising to find that Italian children consider themselves socially competent. They may just have had more opportunities to develop social efficacy within their microsystem.

## ◆ ADOLESCENCE

Adolescence is a particularly interesting period of transition in the lifespan. It begins with biological maturation and ends with society's acceptance of the young person as an adult. Most Western societies have clear social markers that define when a young person is considered mature enough to assume adult responsibilities (e.g., voting in elections) and adult privileges (e.g., driving a car or consuming alcohol). In contrast to many nonindustrialized cultures, adolescence generally lasts several years in most modern Western cultures. Adolescents in non-Western societies assume adult responsibilities much earlier, because these societies cannot afford to let their young people be "nonproductive" and engage in idle "self-discovery" for an extended time.

## Identity Formation

During the adolescent years, young people encounter one of the most important developmental tasks of their lives—the establishment of an individual identity. **Identity** is a person's self-definition as a separate and distinct individual, including behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes. Simply stated, the individual is trying to answer the question "Who am I?" Finding the answer isn't always easy and involves many of those within one's various ecological systems, including family and friends, members of peer groups, and teachers. Some adolescents find the journey particularly difficult and have to deal with serious issues, including antisocial or delinquent behavior. These topics receive attention in the section that follows.

Psychologist Erik Erikson is generally credited with the first complete analysis of identity development. Furthermore, he proposed the integration of identity, social roles, and the broader cultural context (Erikson, 1963). In his cross-cultural research, he collected evidence for the universal existence of identity development, yet the exact process by which individuals achieve an adult identity is influenced by specific contextual factors. The basic premise of identity development across cultures is that it is rooted in the physical and psychological developmental changes an individual experiences during the adolescent period.

It has long been assumed, particularly in Western societies, and most notably in the United States, that the transition to adulthood is a rather painful and psychologically challenging event (Hall, 1904). However, other research shows that the experience of stress during adolescence varies cross-culturally (Offer, Ostrov, Howard, & Atkinson, 1988). Some writers suggest that adolescence is more stressful when individuals are confronted with a large number of choices, as they frequently are in Western cultures. In non-Western societies, in which roles are frequently more clearly defined and choices are more limited, the transition to adulthood appears to be much smoother. For example, if the firstborn child is expected to take over the family business and assume care of the aging parents, it is not necessary for him to explore a variety of social roles in order to find a suitable adult identity. The important decisions have already been made for him. In contrast, those societies that value independence offer adolescents numerous opportunities to explore a variety of different social roles, thereby making the search for identity more difficult and of longer duration.

One study serves as an example of the influences of specific contextual factors on identity development. Tzuriel (1992) was interested in knowing whether adolescents exposed to multiple (and sometimes conflicting) sets of norms and expectations experience more identity conflict than adolescents with a less ambiguous environment. Israeli Arabs, who represent a relatively small minority in Israel, grow up experiencing elements of both their traditional



*Personal identity is expressed in interesting ways throughout the world.*  
(© PhotoDisc/Getty images)

culture and the Jewish majority culture. In contrast, Israeli Jews know a more homogeneous culture, in which their values and beliefs are reflected and reinforced. Would Israeli Arabs have a more negative view of themselves or express more confusion regarding their identity as a result of their different cultural experiences? Among the six factors of identity examined in this study, Arab youths expressed more self-confidence, a stronger sense of ideological and vocational commitment, and more genuineness. In contrast, Jewish adolescents reported more feelings of alienation and discontent with their appearance and behavior. However, they also recognized that others valued them and their abilities.

These findings suggest that Jewish adolescents experienced a somewhat different struggle in their identity formation than did Arabs. Tzuriel speculates that the ambiguous environment, especially among Israeli Arabs, may actually facilitate identity exploration and self-awareness in relation to identity issues. Thus, a seemingly ambiguous environment may have a more positive influence on identity formation than common sense would suggest. With the resolution of the identity conflict, most adolescents achieve an identity with which they are comfortable and adjust their behavior accordingly.

### Social Identity Formation

We tend to think of identity as something that is very unique and represents the individual's personal history, experiences, and personality. However, our lives are inextricably connected with those around us—our family, our peers, our coworkers. Viewed from an ecological systems view, groups of people in a given context show a great degree of overlap. It is not surprising, therefore, that part of what we like to think of as our self results from what we share with others. Psychologists call these shared aspects of self “social identities.” French psychologist H. Tajfel (1981) defines **social identity** as *“that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership”* (p. 255).

We tend to belong to multiple groups. Some are assigned to us (e.g., gender, nationality), while we choose others (e.g., political affiliation). Among these, ethnic or cultural identity has been singled out as particularly important to self-concept and the psychological functioning of ethnic group members. Phinney (1990) and others suggest that the formation of ethnic or cultural identity is similar to the formation of ego-identity as outlined by Erikson.

Ethnic or cultural identity formation appears to take place in three stages. The first stage, generally occurring in adolescence, is characterized by the lack of exploration of ethnic identity. The second stage involves becoming aware of one's ethnicity and actively exploring that ethnicity. At this stage, the person may engage in ethnic group activities, including reading and talking to people about the culture and participating in cultural events. The completion of this stage results in the final stage: ethnic identity achievement. This stage is characterized by a deeper understanding of one's ethnicity and the internalization of ethnic identity into the self. Because this understanding of ethnic identity varies from person to person, according to personal history and ecological systems, the implications for the self-concept and, ultimately, social behavior may also vary. For example, one person may become deeply involved in the activities of her ethnic group by maintaining the language, wearing traditional dress, and practicing ethnic rituals and customs. For another person, ethnic identity achievement may result in an intrinsic confidence in his ethnicity and not necessarily require strong ethnic involvement.

### Cultural Influences on Social Identity

Just as the larger cultural context influences the specific content of adolescents' self-concepts and personal identity, culture also plays an important role in the progression of social identity formation. With regard to ethnic identity as an example of social identity, the position an ethnic group holds



in the larger society (minority or majority status) and relationships among ethnic groups are the most influential of these cultural factors (Phinney, Lochner, & Murphy, 1990).

Research in the West Indies shows how general cultural conditions and beliefs (i.e., macrosystem) shape the basis from which young people begin their ethnic identity formation. Gopal-McNicol (1995) presented black and white preschool children with black and white dolls. The investigator asked the children questions such as "Which doll would you like to play with?" "Which doll do you want to be?" "Which doll is rich, ugly, pretty?" Similar to research in the United States, nearly five decades earlier (Clark & Clark, 1947), most of the children chose the white doll in response to the positive questions. The author concludes that colonialism, along with the representation of blacks and whites in the media, has made a marked impact on attitudes toward and perceptions of ethnic groups in the West Indies. It is not unreasonable to assume that these attitudes and perceptions play an important role in the eventual ethnic identity formation of those black and white children who participated in the study.

Contemporary adolescents are growing up in a world much more culturally diverse than that of their parents and grandparents. This increased globalization has implications for adolescents in many societies as they attempt to develop and establish their cultural identities. Jensen (2003) suggests that adolescents increasingly form multicultural identities as a result of their exposure to diverse cultural beliefs and behaviors either from first-hand contact with people from other cultures or through the media. She further argues that the process of developing a cultural identity during adolescence in a global society has become more complex and presents more challenges than it did just a generation or two ago.

As an example, Jensen (2003) discusses the changing view of marriage in India. The cultural tradition of arranged marriage in India is deeply rooted in values such as obligation to one's family and conforming to social roles rather than pursuing individual preferences. In today's more global Indian society, young Indian women and men are also exposed to values that emphasize freedom of choice and individual rights. Multiple traditional and nontraditional cultural values and practices influence adolescents' conceptions of who they are and how they fit into the world. The words of a young Indian woman exemplify this process of negotiating multiple cultural identities: "I've always insisted that I've got to have the right man and I won't just be able to adjust to anyone. . . . There have been pressures, if I can call them that, from family, but I've . . . not given in to it. I won't do that because I know the situation now. . . . From the very beginning things foreign and imported were very glamorous to me. From those days onward [when I became familiar with things foreign], I was against having an arranged marriage. Arranged marriages in India are becoming obsolete, I think" (Jensen, 2003, p. 4).



In addition to a general globalization that happens at the macrolevel of the ecological system, cultural influences that occur at the microlevel contribute to personal and social identity. Huntsinger and Jose (2006) discovered some systematic changes in self-reported personality characteristics among second-generation Chinese American and European American adolescents. First, all young people seemed to increase in extraversion and independence over the period of five years. This seems to be a result of normative developmental influences, such as becoming more independent from parents, building social relationship with peers, and defining one's independent identity.

Second, the two ethnic groups of adolescents became more similar in their self-reported personality characteristics over the span of five years. At the beginning of the study, the two groups differed significantly in eight of thirteen personality dimensions measured (i.e., emotional stability, excitability, dominance, cheerfulness, shrewdness, apprehension, sensitivity, and withdrawal). Five years later, the same two groups only differed in cheerfulness and boldness. The researchers attribute these changes in part to acculturative influences that may have affected particularly the Chinese American group in steering their development toward adopting qualities that are adaptive in the American cultural environment.

As researchers have begun to recognize increasing globalization of the adolescent world, they have come to adopt more complex models to interpret their research findings and understand adolescent identity development. In recent years, developmental researchers have pointed explicitly to ecological systems theory as a useful model to guide research and practice (Spencer et al., 2003; Swanson et al., 2003). In fact, globalization is a good example of a sociohistorical force that is captured by the "chronosystem" in the ecological model. As we saw in the preceding discussion of identity formation, the globalization of values, beliefs, and practices permeates all levels of the ecological system and greatly influences individuals' developmental paths.

## ◆ ADULTHOOD

### A Time of Stability and Change

Given a secure identity by the early to mid-twenties, along with a set of relatively stable personality dispositions (traits), one might assume that personality would not change much after adolescence. However, distinct patterns of personality development, related to temperament traits, continue to occur. In particular, adults become more agreeable, more conscientious, more emotionally stable, but less extraverted and less open to experience. Numerous studies examining these "Big Five" personality traits have shown this pattern to be surprisingly consistent across many age groups and cultures, such as the

**TABLE 1** The Big Five Personality Traits

TRAIT	DESCRIPTION
Agreeableness	Tendency to be compassionate, cooperative, generous, trusting, sympathetic, and altruistic versus suspicious, critical, and antagonistic toward others
Conscientiousness	Tendency to be well-organized, reliable, hardworking, persistent, ambitious, reliable, and responsible versus disorganized, negligent, and irresponsible
Extroversion	Tendency to be energetic, active, outgoing, and sociable versus quiet, deliberate, reserved, and less involved in the social world
Openness to experience	Tendency to be curious, imaginative, creative, and artistic versus conventional, unimaginative, and uncreative
Neuroticism	Tendency to be emotional, anxious, unstable, temperamental, and worried versus unemotional, calm, stable, even-tempered, and not easily upset

*Sources:* Ahadi & Rothbart, 1994; McCrae & Costa, 1990; McCrae & Costa, 2003; McCrae & John, 1992.

United States, Germany, South Korea, Italy, Croatia, and Portugal (McCrae and Allik, 2002; McCrae et al., 1999; McCrae and Costa, 2003). See Table 1 for a description of these traits. (As a useful memory aid, you may want to note that the first letters of the five traits spell the word “OCEAN”.)

The big five personality traits were “discovered” when researchers performed statistical analysis on adjectives that describe personality characteristics, as well as on existing personality tests (also based on language). They assumed that natural language, used to communicate differences and similarities between oneself and others, reflects the socially relevant dimensions of personality. Therefore, the analysis of natural language should reveal the characteristics that are important in describing oneself and others. Their analysis showed that all descriptors used in natural language, as well as test items designed to measure personality, can be represented by five common dimensions—the “Big Five” personality traits. Further research indicated that these five traits are also found in different languages and different cultures. For recent research on these traits, see Stankov and Lee (2009).

Robert McCrae (2004), one of the main proponents of the Five Factor Theory, even goes so far as to suggest that humans, as a species, have a genetic predisposition to develop in basically the same way, regardless of life experiences or cultural influences. McCrae cites the universal occurrence of the five traits and the seemingly universal pattern of personality change as evidence of a biological basis for personality and personality change.

Are we destined by biology to become more agreeable, conscientious, emotionally stable, and less sociable and open to experience, relative to when we were younger? Are we bound to change in much the same way as our parents and grandparents did?

While there seems to be a universal pattern of adult personality development and change, genetic influences offer one possible explanation. Roberts, Wood, and Smith (2005) adopt a different view. They suggest that it is not genetic "hardwiring" that predicts universal patterns of personality development. Rather, it is universally occurring tasks of social living that lead to a shared pattern of personality trait development.

Roberts and his colleagues argue that "the majority of people in a majority of different cultures go through similar life transitions at roughly the same age" (p. 173). All cultures have defined times at which certain life events are supposed to take place. For example, at some point in their lives, individuals in most cultures are expected to find a partner, start a family, produce offspring, work for a living, and contribute to one's community. These are normative tasks that, like Erikson's classic life stages, involve the conflict between acquiring new competencies and maintaining the status quo.

It has been suggested that these normative life tasks affect the adult personality in several ways. First, people adjust more easily to transitions that occur according to normative tasks than to transitions that are "not on time." The unexpected death of a child represents an "off-time" event, because parents are supposed to be survived by their children. However, the same event, while unexpected, is not considered "off-time" in societies with high infant mortality rates. Second, a new stage of life requires changes in behavior that frequently result in personality changes. Young adults who experience their first serious romantic relationship increase their emotional stability and conscientiousness (Neyer & Asendorpf, 2001). In turn, individuals who are more emotionally stable and conscientious tend to have relationships that last longer and are more satisfying (Roberts & Bogg, 2004).

Finally, certain personality traits appear to be associated with adherence or nonadherence to the normative tasks. Helson and her colleagues (1984) examined 141 women over a period of several decades and found that those whose lives followed the cultural expectations of women at that time (e.g., prescribed role of wife and mother) displayed an increase in tolerance, responsibility, nurturance, and self-control, but also a decrease in self-confidence and feelings of competence. Those women who chose a career path and departed from their prescribed roles as mothers adapted to this role by developing high levels of confidence, initiative, and intellectual independence. In conclusion, during adulthood personality develops within the ecological system in which a person finds herself, but the extent of this change is inhibited or promoted by genetic predisposition.

## ◆ LATE ADULTHOOD

### Personality Changes in Senescence or Illness

Personality traits established throughout life continue to guide behavior into late adulthood. In fact, personality appears to “stabilize” in older age. Johnson and colleagues (2005) studied pairs of monozygotic and same-sex dizygotic twins between the ages of fifty and seventy. These adults completed the same personality questionnaires five years apart. Results revealed that personality traits were highly stable over time, strongly influenced by both genetics and nonshared environment. In their discussion, the authors point out that their study confirms the genetic influences on personality stability. On the other hand, they also observed that environmental influences appear to be more important in later life, perhaps because the environment in which people live tends to be more stable later in life. For example, people will have lived within the same community for many years, surrounded by long-time friends and family. Overall, there is much consensus that personality is very stable in older age and any changes that do occur are relatively minimal (Lautenschlager & Foerster, 2007).

If that is the case, how does one explain the sometimes highly observable behavior changes in the elderly that are often reported by families or health care professionals? Such changes include increased anxiety, apathy, depression, and hostility. With increasing age, people tend to experience more chronic and severe illnesses. Both the organic changes associated with these illnesses (e.g., Alzheimer’s disease) and the stressors related to coping with illnesses can lead to personality changes in older age. Lautenschlager and Foerster conclude, “Conceptually, personality traits are considered to be stable. . . . More significant personality changes in old age need to be considered as warning signs for the potential presence of an underlying organic illness, most suspiciously due to different forms of dementia” (2007, p. 66).

The diagnosis of illness as well as the way individuals respond to illness and cope with it is largely influenced by the cultural and ecological system. For example, in two comparable samples of elderly individuals suffering from dementia, personality and behavioral disorders were more frequently observed in African Americans in Indianapolis than their African counterparts in Nigeria (Hendries, Gao, & Baiewu, 2000). In this case, increased stubbornness, irritability, and anger were more prevalent in American dementia patients than in Nigerian patients. Does this mean dementia affects the personality of individuals in one cultural group more than those in another? Most likely, this difference is a result of cultural expectations about aging, personality, and concepts of deviant behavior.

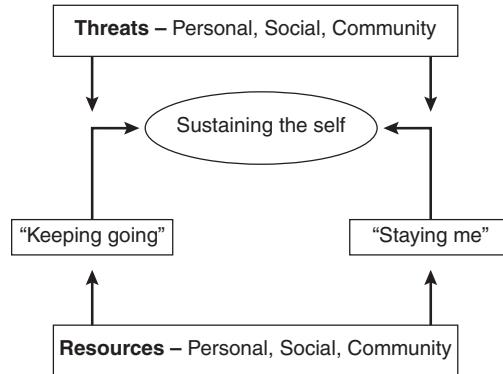
Just as personality change can be a result of illness, personality is also a predictor of health, illness, and mortality. For example, a longitudinal study of Japanese elderly revealed that conscientiousness, extraversion, and openness

were associated with lower mortality rate (Iwasia et al., 2008). The authors speculate that more conscientious people take greater care of their health, more extraverted people are more socially active and have better support systems, and more open people adapt more easily to the changes and challenges of older age.

### **The “Aging” Self**

Adults face a number of unique developmental conditions in their later years of life. Aside from the challenges of physical aging, they frequently experience negative stereotypes and ageism. Yet, consistently, researchers find that the majority of adults maintain a positive self-concept, a sense of well-being, and continue to be productive members of society (Gething et al., 2003). This phenomenon seems to be rooted in the developing self, allowing it to remain stable and continuous, and, at the same time, flexible enough to assimilate to changing ecological conditions. Sneed and Whitbourne (2005) synthesize various motivation and self-theories and propose that “age-related changes in adulthood are negotiated through processes of identity assimilation, identity accommodation, and identity balance” (p. 382). In their theory, the successfully aging self is a combination of these three processes.

When faced with information that challenges the existing positive self-concept, a person will initially assimilate the environment in a way that is consistent with the self. For example, an adult suffering from hearing loss may explain his failure to have conversations on the telephone with “a bad connection” and, as a consequence, avoid the telephone. This strategy, identity assimilation, maintains a positive sense of self, but also limits a person’s ability to seek out experiences and may restrict his behavior. After some time, assimilation may no longer be functional. Then, a person’s well-being comes to depend on the self’s ability to adapt to a changing environment. Identity accommodation involves changing the self-concept in response to challenging experiences. However, the accommodating self is less stable, and an inconsistent self is associated with low self-esteem. Thus, neither identity assimilation nor identity accommodation alone is conducive to prolonged well-being. Instead, Whitbourne and her associates conclude that identity balance is the most adaptive response to aging. Identity balance allows people to make favorable changes to their self-concept when challenged, but at the same time to maintain a consistent sense of solid identity. This model is echoed in work by Denise Tanner, a professor of social work in Britain, who interviewed several older British adults (aged 70–94) over a period of three years. Qualitative analysis of these interviews revealed that these aging adults indeed employed both assimilation and accommodation strategies to cope with threats to the self. In Figure 2, we show how the strategies that “sustain the self” through change and stability are embedded in the ecological system, which represents both resources and threats to self and well-being.



**FIGURE 2** Sustaining the Self in Older Age

Source: Tanner, D. (2007). Reprinted by Permission of SAGE.

## ◆ SUMMARY

This chapter discusses the development of individual, self, and personality across cultures and in specific cultural contexts. Some aspects of personality and behavior are clearly influenced by innate temperamental dispositions. The ways in which individual temperament is expressed and what is considered acceptable are shown to be largely dependent on cultural values and practices. Discussion also focuses on cultural variations in the concept of person and self and their relationship to the early development of self-concept. While adolescents in most cultures experience the need to establish an identity, the manner in which they accomplish this and the specific issues and behaviors related to it show great cultural variation. Finally, we raise the question whether seemingly universal patterns of personality development in adulthood are the result of “hardwired” developmental processes or the result of universal socially prescribed “normative life tasks.” We also establish that personality and self continue to develop and change throughout life, and in old age help the individual adapt to the unique challenges in later life.

## ◆ STUDY QUESTIONS

- Use the examples of Hamadi and Enkeri to describe how children and their environment shape each other and create a “goodness of fit.”
- Using the ecological model, explain why the concept “individualism/collectivism” is limited in explaining cultural differences in self-concept.
- Proponents of the Big Five personality theory claim that our personality changes in a distinctly universal pattern as we get older. What is this pattern?

## ◆ FURTHER READINGS

A. T. Church & M. S. Katigbak. (2002). Studying personality traits across cultures: Philippine examples. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture* (Unit 6, Chapter 2). (<http://orpc.iaccp.org>) International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology.

This online chapter reviews the questions addressed by researchers who study personality traits across cultures, including whether traits are used in all cultures to understand persons and their behavior, the universality versus culture-specific traits, the validity of imported and indigenous measures of personality traits, and the meaningfulness of trait comparisons across cultures. Evidence relevant to these questions is summarized for one collectivistic culture—the Philippines.

Sigmund Freud. (1961). *Civilization and Its Discontents* (Vol. 21). London: Hogarth. One of the most important writings on the interaction between personality and culture by one of the most creative and influential contributors to the field of psychology.

R. R. McCrae. (2009). Cross-cultural research on the five-factor model of personality. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture* (Unit 6, Chapter 1, Version 2). (<http://orpc.iaccp.org>) International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology. An online chapter discussing the Five-Factor model, its use across cultures, and some recent research findings.

The Big Five Personality Test.

If you are interested in learning more about the big five personality traits mentioned in this chapter, you can take a free, anonymous, online test that will help you understand the traits as they relate to your personality by going to <http://www.outofservice.com/bigfive/>.

## ◆ DEVELOPMENTAL ANALYSIS

### CULTURE, SELF, AND PERSONALITY

My name is Matilda Skelton, but everyone—thankfully—calls me “Maddi.” I was born on September 17, 1938, in Elfville, Pennsylvania, a small farming community settled by Irish immigrants (population 1734). In this chapter, temperament, ecological systems, and the developmental niche all seem to be intertwined. This was certainly the case with me. At times, my mother said I was an “easy child” because I was usually happy, outgoing, and slept fairly well. I certainly enjoyed my meals, especially desserts, even as an infant in a high chair. However, occasionally I could be a “difficult child,” as when I would insist on climbing trees and jumping to the ground! My younger sister was more difficult than I was—maybe because she was the middle child, and

(continued)

my brother, the youngest, was more “slow-to-warm-up.” It is not unusual for a family to have all these types of children. Just when my husband and I (like most parents) thought we had learned all we needed to know about successfully raising children, along came the next one who was so different, in many ways, from the previous child. Maybe this is true in your family, too.

Apparently, as a child, I was determined to establish my own personality. I didn’t always conform to the norms in terms of clothes, play activities, and school interests. I felt confident in most of my emerging abilities (such as doing math and playing sports) and had a good self-concept—often to the point of being stubborn, especially during my adolescent years. I guess you might say I had high self-efficacy. Although our town didn’t have the cultural diversity that many places have today, I found a large part of my cultural and ethnic identity in my Irish background (reflected in my red hair, freckles, and sense of humor).

In terms of personality, I have always tended to be extroverted and outgoing, agreeable and trusting, well-organized, hardworking, and ambitious (as reflected in my career accomplishments), curious, creative, and open to new experiences (demonstrated in my travels and efforts at cooking new foods). I see some of these same personality characteristics in our children and grandchildren.

As I approach the seventh decade of my life, I’m generally happy with the person I have become, and as I look back on my early life, I see the many influences that my family, culture, developmental niche, and unique ecological system had on the development of my self-concept and personality. Maybe I would have changed some things—but not many. It’s been a good life so far.





## CULTURE AND ISSUES OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY

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*Alisa and Alan are middle-aged adult siblings who grew up in a small town in the Midwestern United States. As young children, they lived in a single-parent home with their mother, who worked as a secretary. Growing up, they experienced typical gender socialization for that time. Alisa, dressed in her favorite party dress, enjoyed playing with her dolls and stuffed animals in her room; while Alan, in his sturdy jeans and T-shirt, played rough and tumble games outside. During their school years, Alan was encouraged to study science and went on to become an engineer. Alisa, who did well in school, hoped to have a career too but was raised to see her future role as a wife and mother. Both Alisa and Alan married and had children. One of Alisa's daughters is an astronaut in the American space program and another is a surgeon. Now divorced, Alisa takes care of her elderly mother since Alan lives and works in Japan.*



*When Badal was a 10-year-old boy, he moved with his family from India to England. According to his parents, he was a sociable child who is well-mannered and enjoyed spending time at home. Badal's parents were also aware that he dressed and acted in a very feminine manner and often spoke of wanting to be a girl. The parents are non-English-speaking Buddhists and described a belief system that accepts gender ambivalence and the notion that some children are born as a 'third gender'. At home, Badal was not discouraged from cross-gendered behavior but at school he was teased by his peers and experienced academic difficulties. He eventually finished school and joined the British Voluntary Service Overseas to work with HIV/AIDS programs in India. Now 24, Badal has remained in India. He has no plans to marry and have children. He sees himself working as a youth counselor and living in his closely-knit community of friends where he feels comfortable among a mix of men, women, and transgendered people.*



From Chapter 8 of *Lives Across Cultures: Cross-Cultural Human Development*, Fifth Edition. Harry W. Gardiner, Corinne Kosmitzki. Copyright © 2011 by Pearson Education, Inc. All rights reserved.

These three individuals experienced childhood in very different ways, much of it shaped by the norms and beliefs associated with gender. Did Alisa and Alan deliberately “choose” different interests, or were they “assigned” those interests? Did the upbringing experienced by these children influence the choices and preferences all three made in later life? How did culture contribute to these differences in upbringing?

Decades of psychological and anthropological research have produced evidence showing that differences between women and men appear in all known cultures. How many consistent differences exist and to what degree they can be rendered truly “universal” is the subject of much discussion in the field. In this chapter, we will present some of the developmental challenges involved in growing up female or male in different cultures.

Many introductory textbooks in psychology carefully differentiate the concepts “sex” and “gender.” **Sex** is usually defined as *biological aspects of femaleness and maleness*; **gender**, as *acquired behavioral and psychological aspects of being a woman or a man* (Ashmore, 1990). This nature–nurture distinction provides the illusion of two nearly independent sources of behavior. However, on further review, it becomes clear that the two are not as independent as these definitions might suggest. Rather, it is essential to understand that the relationship between biological sex characteristics and gendered social behavior is much more complex.

Before we reflect on the role gender plays in every stage of a person’s life, we will introduce some of the issues and theoretical perspectives relevant in gender research today.

## ◆ ECOLOGICAL CONTEXT: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER DIFFERENCES

### Biological Perspectives

It is generally accepted that females and males of any species exhibit distinct biological and physiological differences, which are present at birth. Based on this fact, proponents of the biological perspective view the expression of sex in its cultural context (i.e., gender) as predetermined by the genetic, physiological, and neural foundations of biological sex.

Research with mammals and non-primate populations has provided evidence that prenatal exposure and manipulation of androgens (male “sex hormones” that stimulate or control the development and maintenance of masculine characteristics) and estrogens (female sex hormones) correlate with measurable changes in brain development. In infants and children, these differences align with sex-typical choices of toys and play behavior (Knickmeyer & Baron-Cohen, 2006; Shepard, Michopolous, Toufexis, & Wilson, 2009).

In humans, similar patterns emerge: Studies of prenatal exposure to testosterone show that high testosterone levels correlate with male-typical behaviors in childhood (Hines, 2004, Hines, 2009, Auyeung et al., 2009). Such biological factors continue to shape behavior throughout life. For example, there is evidence that testosterone level is related to aggressiveness (Book, Starzyk, & Quinsey, 2001). Since men are known to have higher average levels of testosterone than do women, they should be expected to exhibit more aggressive behavior than do women. And, in fact, a review of research on this topic reveals that this is indeed the case (Archer & Mehdikhani, 2004).

On the other hand, it is entirely possible that in cultures that encourage aggressive behavior in both genders, women will be more aggressive than men in cultures that discourage aggressive behaviors in general. In addition, there is clear evidence that females show more aggressive behavior than males in certain situations, for example protecting their offspring from predators.

Even though the biological research finds convincing evidence that genetic makeup and hormonal exposure predispose the developing brain to gender-typical behaviors, we will see in the next section that the biological foundations alone are not sufficient to account for sex- and gender-typical behavior throughout life.

### **Evolutionary Perspectives**

According to theories of evolution many gender differences may be explained by an organism's motivation to pass on genes by producing offspring and to assure the survival of the species at large (Buss, 1994a, b; Low, 1989). Among humans, the particular way in which this is accomplished appears to differ among men and women. Women, who have the ability to produce a limited number of children over a lifetime, put their energy into creating an environment that ensures the survival of a maximum number of children. To accomplish this, a large number of a woman's activities are directed toward the family and involve food preparation, home maintenance, and creation of a protective network of other people who will assist in larger tasks and also help protect against enemies (a part of the microsystem). In other words, the woman creates a developmental niche (or a microsystem) that will be most favorable for the development of her children.

In contrast, men can produce an almost unlimited number of children, given the availability of women. According to the evolutionary perspective, men strive to produce as many children as possible, because the more they have, the more will be likely to survive. To do this, they have to compete with other men. Under these circumstances, much of their energy is devoted to competing with other men for available women, and the focus is on physical strength and aggressiveness.

Despite these different reproductive strategies, women and men have a common goal; this ensures that their children have the greatest possible chance of survival. According to Darwin's "survival of the fittest" doctrine, children have a greater chance of survival if both parents have healthy genes. Consequently, men and women can increase the chances of their children's survival if they mate with a healthy partner. Both men and women enhance and display those characteristics that are evolutionarily attractive in order to be chosen as mates. According to this perspective, men tend to exhibit behavior that conveys strength and sexual prowess, such as engaging in challenging sports and games or displaying symbols of wealth and status—ranging from a Mercedes Benz in Europe to camels in Egypt (Chuang, 2002). Women, on the other hand, tend to reinforce symbols of youthfulness and health, such as smooth skin, healthy teeth and hair, and a strong body, to communicate that they are young and fit enough to bear many children. If one accepts this evolutionary view of reproductive strategies, it may help explain those social behaviors that are considered specific to women and men in most societies.

### **Socialization and Learning Perspectives**

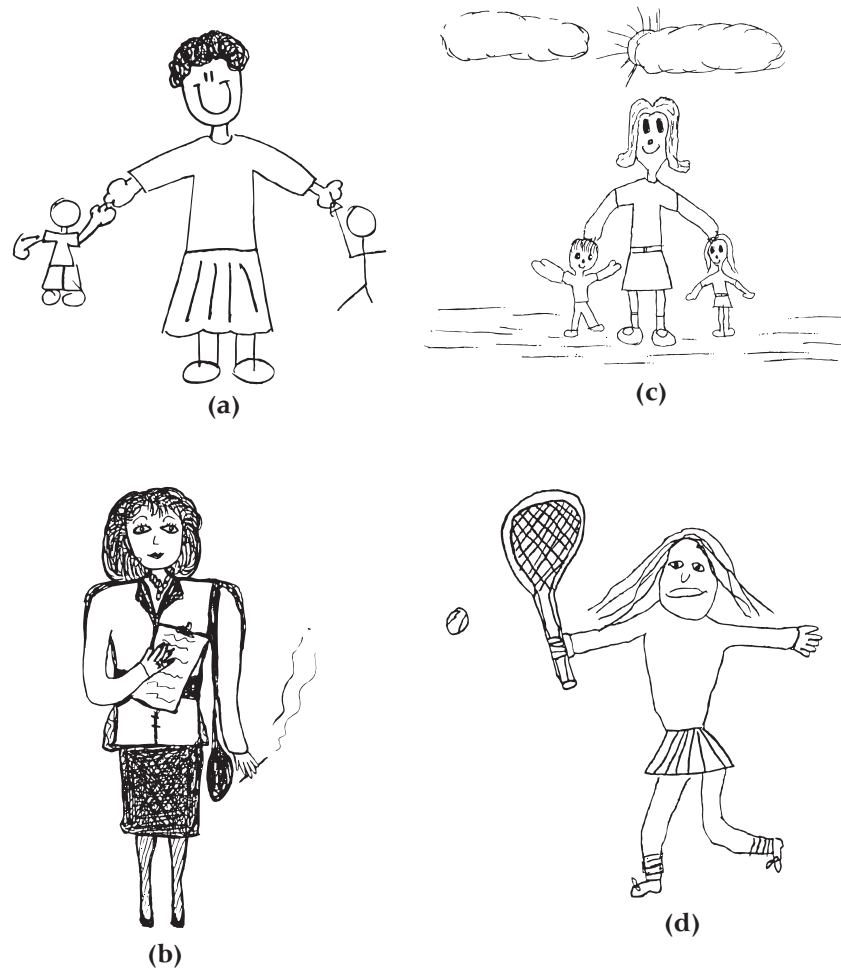
Beginning at birth, individuals are socialized into their particular culture and taught the values, beliefs, and behaviors that will permit them to successfully function within it. From an early age, as part of the socialization process, children learn to conform to the roles that culture considers consistent with their biological sex. In general, girls are rewarded and praised for exhibiting behavior considered desirable for a woman in that culture and discouraged from showing undesirable, or gender-inappropriate, behavior. In turn, boys are rewarded for "male-like" behavior and ridiculed if they exhibit behaviors reserved for girls or women.

By no means are "feminine" and "masculine" behaviors consistent across cultures. Occasionally, gender-specific norms may interact with cultural norms and modify gender roles. For example, while modesty and humility are viewed in China as culturally important values for all individuals, in other cultures these traits are more desirable, and more expected, in women than in men. For example, Chinese women have been found to be more self-effacing, modest, and less likely to take personal credit for accomplishments than are men, even though the cultural norm requires modesty from both genders (Crittenden, 1991). However, other sources suggest that these values, as well as gender socialization, are undergoing significant change in China and in other Asian countries (Smith, 1992; Yi, 1993).

In addition to direct reinforcement and punishment, children in most cultures also observe same-sex adult role models and imitate the gender-appropriate behavior exhibited by these models. These behaviors are further reinforced and become internalized as attributes of gender-appropriate behavior patterns. In

short, gender concepts are salient at many, if not all, levels of the ecological system and linked to gender differences as they occur in various cultures.

As Gibbons, Stiles, and their associates (1996) have demonstrated, these cultural “systems” influence the gender socialization of children. In their studies, the researchers obtained drawings of the “ideal” woman and the “ideal” man from children and adolescents in several different countries (see Figure 1 a–d). Although they found a common tendency for the children



**FIGURE 1** Drawings of Ideal Women by Children of Various Cultures  
 a. Drawing by a fourteen-year-old girl from Mexico; b. Drawing by a fifteen-year-old girl from the Netherlands; c. Drawing by a thirteen-year-old boy from Guatemala; d. Drawing by an eleven-year-old boy from Spain

Source: From material from J. L. Gibbons and D. A. Stiles. Reprinted by permission.

to portray women as caring for children and the men as occupied in work roles outside the home, the researchers also found specific cultural differences. For instance, adolescents were more likely to draw the ideal woman in a nontraditional role as businesswoman in cultures with “masculine” work values, and the ideal man in a nontraditional role as caretaker in “feminine” cultures. The latter was the case in Norway, where adolescents more often expect the “ideal” man to participate in housework (Stiles & Gibbons, 1995). The researchers explain this finding by pointing out that Norwegians hold very egalitarian beliefs about the roles and status of women and men in their society and convey these beliefs to their children. Ideals may not always reflect social reality. Loscocco and Kalleberg (1988) point out that in highly “masculine” cultures such as Japan, positions of power are largely held by men, and women have only limited opportunity to achieve status and power and tend to remain in subordinate positions, both in the workplace and in private life. However, there is evidence that the role of Japanese women is slowly changing, affecting the image of women throughout Asia (Smith, 1992).

In summary, these different perspectives all propose a slightly different explanation for why some behaviors seem to vary with gender. The biological perspective considers gendered behavior a result of underlying biological and physiological processes. The evolutionary perspective describes gendered behavior as the result of evolutionary processes. Gendered behaviors represent behaviors that have evolved as most adaptive, considering both biological attributes and environmental challenges. Finally, socialization and learning theories see gendered behaviors as the result of a person’s individual learning history within a specific sociocultural context. None of these perspectives can fully account for the phenomenon of gender differences and how they originated. Nonetheless, each can explain influences on various levels of the ecological system.

Keep this in mind when we now turn our attention to how issues of sex and gender relate to development in each of the stages of the lifespan.

## ◆ INFANCY

As we described in the section on “biological perspectives,” the foundations for behavior are shaped by an intricate interaction of genetic and physiological factors. Even though these biological characteristics vary significantly from person to person, and sometimes the classification as “male” or “female” is ambiguous at best, culture creates an artificial dichotomy of two mutually exclusive groups. Once the doctor or midwife announces “It’s a girl” or “It’s a boy,” the first major decision in a child’s life has been made for her or him. The labels “female” and “male” come with distinctive sets of normative expectations that build a framework for identity as well as interactions between

people in most situations (Ridgeway, 2009). Furthermore, the assigned membership in one or the other such exclusive category carries great implications for the individual and his or her ecological system.

### Sex Preference and Sex Ratio at Birth

Within the human population, the distribution of male and female births is approximately equal, with only a slightly higher birthrate for males: 107 male births for every 100 female births (CIA World Factbook, 2009).

Yet, there appear to be some striking differences between cultures, as can be observed in recent demographic data (see Table 1).

These data show that, compared to countries in other parts of the world, in many Asian countries male births outnumber female births by a larger margin. For example, in China 110 boys are born for every 100 girls. India (112 boys per 100 girls) shows a similar pattern. Both countries contrast with Brazil and the United States (105 boys born per 100 girls). While these ratios do not sound vastly different, the absolute numbers are astounding when taking into account total population. In the two population-richest countries combined (China and India), there are *close to 35 million* more male children than female children (0–14 years). In comparison, boys outnumber girls by only 2.5 million in the next two most populated countries combined (the United States and Brazil). Researchers speculate that the cultural tradition of “son preference” along with family planning policies in the former countries have led to this imbalance in male to female birth rates (Hesketh and Xing, 2006; Sen, 2003).

**TABLE 1** Male to Female Population Ratios for Selected Countries and the World

	AT BIRTH	UNDER 15	15–64	OVER 65	TOTAL
World	1.07	1.06	1.02	0.78	1.01
Brazil	1.05	1.04	0.98	0.73	0.98
China	1.1	1.13	1.06	0.9	1.06
India	1.12	1.1	1.06	0.9	1.06
New Zealand	1.05	1.05	1.0	0.84	0.99
South Africa	1.02	1.0	1.02	0.69	0.99
South Korea	1.07	1.1	1.04	0.67	1.0
Sweden	1.06	1.06	1.03	0.79	0.98
Taiwan	1.09	1.08	1.02	0.94	1.02
U.S.A.	1.05	1.04	1.0	0.75	0.97

Source: CIA World Factbook, 2009.

According to cultural traditions in many societies the family name and family property are passed down patrilineally. Sons inherit the family wealth, name, and status, which they will pass on to their sons. Male children are also often expected to support ageing parents. A daughter becomes part of her husband's family and no longer has obligations toward her birth parents. In addition, a dowry system may require parents to pay a dowry price to the future husband. This may become a great financial burden for a family with more than one daughter. Within such an ecological system, parents may prefer sons as insurance for financial support and physical security in older age.

By virtue of the value that is placed on male and female offspring, male and female infants are born into very different ecological systems at birth, and these ecological systems influence development throughout life. For example, cultural preference for male children (macrosystem), the availability of prenatal sex determination technology (exosystem), the newborn son or daughter will likely have different numbers of older brothers or sisters. Almond and Eklund (2008) found evidence for son preference among families within their analysis of census data in the United States, focusing on statistics for families of Chinese, Korean, and Indian descent. In these families, if the first two children were female, the third child is twice as likely to be a boy than a girl. Moreover, when at least one of the first two children is a boy, parents are less likely to have a third child.

In the larger population, these practices ultimately have greater social consequences. Male-biased sex ratios have been thought to relate increased violence and crime among young men (Hudson & Den Boer, 2004) and reduction in unwanted births and female infant mortality (Sen, 2003).

## ◆ CHILDHOOD

Parents are the primary source of socialization in the lives of young children, and they introduce the important knowledge, values, beliefs, and expected behaviors of the culture. One aspect of this concerns society's expectations regarding appropriate behavior for women and men or gender-role stereotypes.

### **Gender Socialization**

One of the most exhaustive investigations of gender stereotypes and attitudes was conducted by Williams and Best (1990), who found significant differences between male and female stereotypes in each of the twenty-five countries studied. In general, passivity, submissiveness, affiliation, and nurturance were seen as more typical in descriptions of women, whereas activity, dominance, achievement, and aggressiveness were more typical of men. In this study,



Williams and Best also found fascinating evidence related to differences in the socialization of gender stereotypes among children five to eleven years of age. For example, across all age groups, children in most countries were more familiar with the male stereotype than with the female, suggesting that male stereotypes are more dominant in their lives and are learned earlier. Only in Brazil, Portugal, and Germany did five-year-old children clearly identify more items associated with the female stereotype. Overall, Williams and Best suggest that gender stereotypes are well-established in children by the time they are eight years old. After that age, they serve as powerful “blueprints” for behaviors that are reinforced throughout life. Gender-role stereotypes not only promote overt behavior and prescribe types of clothing and social rituals, but also influence the way in which men and women in a given society view themselves and others. According to these researchers, by the age of nine, children are already applying gender stereotypes in their descriptions of themselves. In the case of the Midwestern siblings Alisa and Alan, both did well in school and both wanted a career. Yet, Alisa was raised according to the cultural stereotype of women as caretakers. She cared for her husband and two children, and even after her divorce she continued her role as the caretaker of her elderly mother.

Feminist scholars frequently argue that these gender blueprints socialize women into lower-status roles and dependency due to the differential positions of power either group holds in society. Since, in most known societies, men tend to hold positions of power and to distribute available resources, they frequently have the opportunity to define social roles for both women and men. They also have the potential to use resources and status as rewards. To preserve male social dominance, younger men are rewarded for conforming to the behavior that later enables them to achieve positions of power in society. Among these desirable behaviors are competitiveness, aggressiveness, and dominance. If men conform successfully and “play by the rules,” they will gain power, status, and access to resources.

Women, on the other hand, are usually discouraged from exhibiting behaviors that are reserved for men. Instead, an entirely different set of normative behaviors is defined for them. In many cultures, they are expected to be submissive, nurturing, and weak. This feminine ideal is defined by men in order to preserve male privilege. The idea is that weak and submissive individuals are not likely to compete for resources and power. By conforming to this feminine ideal, women become attractive and gain the recognition of powerful men. In turn, they may be rewarded by receiving indirect access to power and resources. Women who refuse to conform to the female gender role will be denied these resources and status. In this case, the differing social status and power of women and men represent an important part of the ecological system in which children grow up. Power differences between women and men are related to their differential treatment by society, as well as gender differences in behavior.



*Being a "homemaker" takes on a new meaning in today's society.*

(© CoCo/Rainbow)

In polygynous societies, in which it is customary for men to have multiple reproductive partners, the competition among men for women is very strong. In polygynous societies, like those of sub-Saharan Africa, young boys are taught to be aggressive and competitive. In societies in which monogamy or even polyandry prevails, the number of reproductive partners is restricted, and men are not engaged in competition to the same extent. For example, the role and socialization of boys in Nyinba, Tibet, are quite different. They are taught cooperation and sharing rather than competition and aggressiveness since they will one day share a common wife and children with one or more men. In addition, polyandrous societies grant women more control over resources and more independence from one particular man. Consequently, socialization of girls focuses more on independence and assertiveness and less on obedience and submissiveness.



*More fathers are staying at home to care for their children while mothers enter the workforce.*  
(© Ronald Mackechnie/Getty images)

### **Cultural Influences on Female and Male Socialization**

In spite of widespread similarities in gender-role expectations across cultures, there are distinct differences in how gender-related behaviors are transmitted to young girls and boys. Depending on availability of role models, displays of expected role behavior, or influence of socialization agents, children in different cultures experience their socialization differently. Examples of gender-role socialization from a variety of cultural perspectives, including Korean, Japanese, Islamic, Indian, Nigerian, and Native American, will serve as illustrations of this point. (See Box 1.)

One cannot view the socialization of certain behaviors independently from the cultural context. Cultures define the basic values and ideals (macrosystems) as well as the agents who teach the values and the settings in which they are taught (microsystems). In turn, individuals growing up in this ecological system will shape their environment by adding individual characteristics to that setting, establishing a unique developmental niche. As a

**BOX 1**
**CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES ON  
GENDER-ROLE SOCIALIZATION**
**Korea**

In Korean society, women observe the Confucian virtues of the *Rule of Three Obediences*, in which they are required to be obedient to their fathers, husbands, and sons. Parents stress the emotional development of girls, who are expected to be kind and nurturing, and the strength and intellectual development of boys, who are expected to be strong and courageous. The division of responsibilities in the Korean household is segregated by gender, with men providing the financial support and women tending to the house.

Schools are also gender-segregated, but both sexes have the opportunity for education. Elementary school attendance is compulsory for both boys and girls, with more boys attending high school and college. Korean schools stress different curricula for males and females, and teachers hold differential expectations based on gender. For example, the curriculum for females is designed to foster feminine traits, and students must take mandatory courses in home economics and subjects geared to women as consumers and childbearers. The male curriculum promotes masculine traits, and male students are required to take technology-type courses.

Marriage is viewed as a stage that everyone should experience. Adult identification depends on getting married, starting a family, and gaining status in one's profession. While modern marriages are no longer solely prearranged to continue the family lineage, this does occasionally still occur. Contemporary Korean society views marriage as a way of fulfilling individuals' happiness.

In Korea, the law states that fathers have rights and obligations over their children in case of divorce, and, although some legal action has been taken to reduce paternal rights, they almost always receive custody. As a result, many women who fear losing their children remain in unhappy marriages.

**Japan**

Modernization has begun to alter Japan and has affected many areas, including gender. For example, more Japanese women remain single or work outside the home than ever before. However, some traditions remain strong. For example, traditionally the eldest male child was responsible for carrying on the family lineage and entitled to an automatic inheritance of the family property. Today, while the oldest son is no longer automatically entitled to the inheritance, he is considered responsible for supporting and caring for aging parents, although, in reality, the daughter-in-law generally provides such care.

Education is extremely important, and, like Korea, there is a gender difference. For example, females are under less academic pressure than males. Later, most Japanese men gravitate toward the occupational role

**BOX 1 CONTINUED**

while women become committed to the domestic role. The “homebody” or “professional housewife” is idealized even though 60 percent of women are in the labor force. Childrearing remains the most important aspect in Japanese women’s lives, and, although more women are working outside the home, this commitment continues, though decreasingly, to exist today.

Finally, women and men both exert a considerable amount of influence but in separate spheres. For example, women tend to control almost all household duties, including home finances and children’s education and, similar to American women, do a disproportionate share of household labor; while men more often spend long hours working and commuting.

**Islamic Culture**

While Islam emphasizes the complementary nature of the sexes, what Islam says about men and women may vary in interpretation and practice. Contrary to what some may believe, Islam does not say that women are naturally inferior. In fact, a Muslim woman is entitled to the following rights: (1) independent ownership, (2) to marry whom she likes and to end an unsuccessful marriage, (3) to education, (4) to keep her own identity, (5) to sexual pleasure, (6) to inheritance, (7) to election and nomination to political offices and participation in public affairs, and (8) to respect. However, because sons carry on the family name and daughters do not economically contribute to the family, there is a definite preference for male children. As children, girls help their mothers with the house (an activity discouraged in boys) and have more restrictions placed on them than boys with regard to their behavior.

Marriage in Islam is viewed as a contract between two equal and consenting partners. The wife has a right to stipulate her own conditions and the dowry belongs to her. Islam considers marriage a lifelong commitment, and while divorce is allowed, it is discouraged. When women marry, they enter a new stage of life in which they are sending signals that they are good wives and mothers and this is a very important way of gathering respect.

While the *Qur’an* advocates equal partnership between husband and wife, the husband often assumes the role of authoritarian and the wife becomes submissive to his wishes and orders—a distinction between what Islam says and its actual practice. Females do have inheritance rights, but they often inherit one-half the part that men do.

Although education is a basic right in Islam for both sexes, educating females has not always occurred. Recently, efforts have been made to improve female education in some Muslim countries; however, educational opportunities for women, especially in the Middle East, lag behind men. For example, the Islamic world, especially the Arab world, is one of the areas that have the highest rates of illiteracy among women, the lowest level of schooling for females, and the smallest number of women in paid employment.

(continued)

**BOX 1** CONTINUED**India**

In India, both age and gender play an important role. Elders, especially elder males, have more status than younger people, and male children are valued more than female children, especially in North India. Marriage is optional for males but considered essential for all girls regardless of caste, class, religion, or ethnicity; and females are often viewed as visitors because they leave home and reside with the husband's family.

A Hindu woman's role is a series of role relationships as daughter, daughter-in-law, wife, and mother, and she achieves her highest status as mother of a son. A daughter-in-law's status is increased when she gives birth to a boy. Divorce is rare and is considered an admission of a woman's failure as a wife and a daughter-in-law. Brides have impressed upon them that walking out of a marriage for any reason disgraces her parental family. The supervision of daughters-in-law is delegated to their mothers-in-law, who wield considerable power. Thus, older women come under the authority of men, but younger women come under the authority of both men and older women.

Socioeconomic status plays a role in gender and beliefs about men and women. For example, upper-middle-class and upper-class women are likely to have an education and, thus, be exposed to modern (often Western) thought. School is considered essential for boys but not necessarily so for girls, although they are taught to read and write. Instead, girls are often kept at home to care for younger children, especially among lower socioeconomic-level families.

**Nigeria**

In infancy, there is little difference in the childrearing of male and female babies, but gender segregation begins in early childhood. The male child, after the age of six, is involved in secret societies that serve as models of adult society. Girls, however, are not allowed to join.

Children are sent to school when money is available, and boys are enrolled more frequently than girls. However, there has been, in certain parts of the society, a rapid growth in the number of educated females. While there are many institutions of higher education in Nigeria, a significant proportion of the population still views advanced education as unnecessary for females. The Igbo tribe has been more accepting of female education and changes in female roles than the Hausa tribe.

Women often marry early, usually in their teens, and have large families. Thus, childbearing occupies their fertile years. Nigerian marriage laws acknowledge that the husband is the head of the household and that he has complete authority over his wife and children. Nigerians often practice polygyny and, under Islamic law, a Muslim male can have up to four wives

**BOX 1 CONTINUED**

if he can support them. Inheritance is often difficult for women unless they can prove that they helped to acquire the material wealth. In some cases, widows are considered property and may be inherited by the husband's oldest male relative.

Finally, there is a difference in the division of labor, with men often involved in cultivating cash crops and blacksmithing, and women, in some areas, selling their weavings and pottery. The Igbo relies on market trade conducted primarily by women as a large part of their economic system. Thus, women's control over local trade helps to establish their independence in a culture primarily dominated by men.

**Native American Culture**

There are over 300 distinct tribes of American Indians who primarily live in California, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona, Alaska, North Carolina, and Washington. The tribes vary in customs, language, and type of family structure, as well as in their degree of acculturation and whether or not they live on reservations or in urban areas. However, despite their great diversity, they are generally viewed as sharing a number of common values, including (1) sharing, (2) cooperation, (3) noninterference, (4) present time orientation, (5) extended family orientation, and (6) harmony with nature.

Traditionally, great value was assigned to the role of women in Native American society and they were frequently the primary educators and historians. Life was rooted in spirituality and the extended family, and traditional ideologies stressed the importance of balance and harmony between the genders and the equal contributions of both to maintain the household and the community. For example, men and women share in the work of grazing, agriculture, and crafts and have equal rights of inheritance.

The status of both women and men increases with age, and age and wisdom are revered in both sexes. The Navajo is a matrilineal society (i.e., the mother's clan is of primary importance and the father's clan is secondary). A Navajo belief is that the people were created from the Changing Woman, who represents the season and the earth, and children of both genders are equally welcomed.

The job of the Navajo father is to provide for his children and to serve as a role model in teaching skills, values, and good behaviors. Mothers teach small children and growing girls. If the father is absent, then the mother's brother assumes some obligations toward her children. Fathers and sons have a more direct relationship than father and daughter.

*Source:* Adapted from *Culture and Gender* by Vicki Ritts, 2001, unpublished manuscript, St. Louis Community College. Reprinted by permission.



consequence, the socialization experiences of individuals in the various cultures described above have taken very different paths.

### **Gender Relationships in Childhood**

Apart from parents and caretakers, the role of peers in childhood socialization cannot be underestimated. In fact, Hartup (1983) points out that “in most cultures, the significance of peer relations as a socialization context is rivaled only by the family” (p. 103). Consequently, same-sex and mixed-sex peer groups provide an effective context for the observation and practice of gender-role behaviors. For example, it could be argued that early gender segregation indicates very large differences in normative expectations for women and men in that society; these differences need to be reinforced early. On the other hand, mixed-sex peer groups throughout childhood and the relative lack of differential treatment of the two genders may indicate greater equality between the genders in adulthood. A look at different cultures shows that the relationship between gender relations in childhood and adult gender-role behavior is not always linear.

There is a large range of cultural variation in the extent to which children’s playmates are of both genders or predominantly of the same gender (Whiting & Whiting, 1975). Gender relations in playgroups range from completely segregated, segregated for part of the time, to intergender relations. The makeup of playgroups can be more or less dictated by cultural conventions that include the gender constellation of the groups.

Overall, however, Eleanor Maccoby’s research (1990, 2002) suggests that the preference for same-sex playmates is universal, regardless of cultural norms prescribing gender-segregated environments in childhood. Although cultural research on playmate preference is still scarce, a few studies conducted in non-Western cultures seem to confirm Maccoby’s claim. Munroe and Romney (2006) analyzed observational data from Belize, Kenya, Nepal, and American Samoa. These four cultures vary in their emphasis on gender differentiation. The Logoli of Kenya and the Newars of Nepal emphasize strict gender-specific roles, rituals, and activities, thus exposing girls and boys to very different socialization experiences. In contrast, among the Garifuna of Belize and in American Samoan society, gender-differentiated socialization is much less pronounced. For example, girls and boys are expected to contribute about equally to work around the house and there are no gender-specific initiation rites.

The seemingly consistent phenomenon of same-sex preference in playmates lends itself to a biological explanation of gender differences. Due to their predisposition, boys might bond together through activities that facilitate physicality and competition. Girls’ pattern of play, in comparison, emphasizes interaction and collaboration. However, biological predisposition toward gender-specific behavior and preferences may only serve as a partial



explanation. Harkness and Super (1985) explain these differences in terms of the developmental niche, in which children actively explore and define gender relations within the parameters set by cultural expectations. In addition, unique group processes, inherent in the microsystem of the playgroup, may highlight the expression of gender-specific behaviors. Gauvain and Cole (2005) note that “gender-related behaviors are more evident when children are observed in groups than when they are tested individually” (p. 187).

## ◆ ADOLESCENCE

### Markers of Sexual Maturation

Much of the change associated with adolescent development centers on **puberty**, *a period of biological transition between childhood and adulthood lasting approximately one to two years*. The physical and physiological changes during puberty are dramatic and have psychological and social consequences.

In boys, transition from child to adult may be marked by several physical events, such as change in voice, emergence of pubic and facial hair, nocturnal ejaculation, or a sudden growth spurt and muscle development. The age at which a boy is granted “adult status” varies greatly by culture, mostly depending on which physical “marker” is used as indicator of physical adulthood. Nonetheless, recent research suggests that human sexual development, regardless of cultural context, may begin as early as age ten (Herdt & McClintock, 2000).

The “landmark event” for girls marking the end of childhood is **menarche**, or *first menstruation*. The importance of viewing menarche within the cultural context and the ecocultural system is illustrated in a study of young girls living at low and high altitudes in Peru. Gonzales and Villena (1996) compared ten- to nineteen-year-old Peruvian girls living in the mountainous regions of Lima with girls of similar age in Cerro de Pasco. Results indicated that those living at higher elevations, where food sources are more limited, experienced the onset of menarche later than those living at sea level in Cerro de Pasco. The authors concluded that although nutrition is an important factor in determining the age at which menarche occurs, one’s physical surroundings and developmental niche also need to be considered. Another example of this close interaction between environment and physical development is a study by Proos, Hofvander, and Tuvemo (1991). They observed that the drastic change in environment experienced by Indian girls adopted in Sweden led to an earlier onset of menarche. This earlier onset may affect the women’s overall height by cutting short the period of physical growth.

Some cross-cultural researchers have focused on the extent to which exposure to modernization alters the menstrual experience of young girls. In one such study, Fitzgerald (1990) examined three Samoan communities as

part of an ongoing stress and health project at the University of Hawaii. One community consisted of residents living in remote traditional villages on the island of Savaii in Western Samoa. A second community, experiencing rapid modernization, was made up of seven villages on the southern coast of the island of Tutuila in American Samoa. The third community was composed of individuals living in affluent neighborhoods in Honolulu, Hawaii. Ninety-three young girls reported on their family medical history, menstrual symptoms, menstrual beliefs and practices, and menstrual experiences. According to Fitzgerald, although the literal translation of the Samoan word for “menstruation” (*ma’imasina*) means “monthly illness,” most Samoans view menstruation as a natural part of life—something given to them by God to prepare them for motherhood—over which they have no control. Findings revealed that the more exposed Samoans were to the influences of modernization, the more likely they were to report severe menstrual symptoms. This suggests that as cultures come into greater contact with each other, the values and beliefs of one tend to influence the behaviors of the other. In this case, the values and beliefs characteristic of the more modern society (Honolulu) tended to affect the menstrual experience of the Samoan islanders. Once again, this tends to support the validity of studying behavior from the perspective of the recurring themes of the ecological model and the developmental niche.

In addition to clear biological markers of sexual maturity, there are distinct cultural markers that indicate a readiness among women and men to find a sexual partner. Biological and cultural markers may or may not coincide, depending on cultural norms. For example, Hindus consider a girl sexually mature with the onset of menstruation. However, a sexually mature unmarried woman living in her father’s house is considered unfortunate for all involved, and it is the duty of the father to marry off his daughter as soon as she reaches puberty or even before.

The transition from adolescence to adulthood is often considered a highly spiritual event that is celebrated with elaborate initiation ceremonies. These ceremonies often involve a ritual change of hairstyle, clothing, tattoos, or even circumcision in order to make the newly gained status as adult visible to all. However, transition to adulthood is not always marked by one single event. Mayan culture, for example, considers young women and men sexually mature and allows them to find a mate when they begin to feel sexual desire. Parents or other members of the community do not get involved in the young person’s decisions about who or when to marry. This generally does not happen until the ages of sixteen to eighteen for women and twenty for men.

### **Gender, Sexuality, and Cultural Taboos**

Once young women and young men are considered sexually mature, they are prepared to experience their first initial sexual encounter. Across cultures,

these experiences vary greatly in terms of how strictly they are guided by cultural norms and which forms they take. The expectation of chastity until marriage (particularly for women) is a norm among many cultures. Patriarchal societies and those based on traditional Catholic or Islamic values generally have very strict chastity norms. Consequently, young women have little or no sexual experience or instruction until they marry. In societies in which girls are allowed to explore their sexuality more or less freely, such as the Masai of Kenya or the Hopi Indians of North America, there are some legal or normative rules about the age at which a girl may become sexually active. Usually, the minimum age is no younger than thirteen or fourteen. Chastity norms rarely apply in the same way to young men. Instead, boys are frequently encouraged to engage in various types of activity in order to practice sexual behavior, satisfy their sexual desires, or express their virility and dominance. Young men's sexual experience is seen as preparation for a long-term relationship or marriage. It is a well-known practice in some cultures for older women, frequently prostitutes or unmarried women in the community, to instruct adolescent boys in sexual matters.

In some cultures, such as the indigenous societies of North and South America, communication about sexual matters is largely taboo and surrounded by myths, so that adolescents are left to explore their sexuality on their own. In their study of Mayan culture in Guatemala, Bertrand, Ward, and Pauc (1992) report that adolescents receive little education or information about sex. Young girls do not learn about menstruation until they experience menarche and also have few sources from which to learn about sexual matters. In contrast, boys learn about physical development in school, from friends, or even from television or movies. While these are informal sources of information, culturally sanctioned information about marriage is conveyed during a traditional religious ceremony. However, according to their findings, this ceremony is considered primarily a ritual and does not provide practical advice and instruction regarding sexual relations.

In addition to prohibiting sexual intercourse before marriage, some societies have strict taboos about sexual activities. In China, the only sexual behavior considered legal and morally permissible is heterosexual intercourse within a monogamous marriage. Any other behavior is considered illegal. Traditional Hinduism prescribes a very specific definition of sexuality, and following that definition is absolutely essential. Any unnatural sexual activity, including extramarital relations or homosexuality, results in losing one's caste, mutilation, or even death. It should be noted that these norms refer to the most strict followers of traditional Hindu teachings. In modern India, as in many other cultures, the norms themselves, as well as the consequences for breaking them, vary greatly.

Young adolescents in many other cultures are permitted to explore and express their sexuality in a variety of ways. For example, among the Maya in Guatemala, it is common to freely choose one's sexual partner. Parents do

not have much to say regarding the selection of a mate or the age of marriage. Nonetheless, Mayan adolescents respect cultural traditions and generally abstain from sexual contact before marriage. Their interactions are typically limited to talking, holding hands, kissing, and embracing.

In cultures in which premarital relations between women and men are not prohibited by cultural norms, they are considered an expression of love and affection. Yet, how love and affection are perceived and expressed is, again, subject to wide cultural variations. In a comparison of college students of four different ethnic backgrounds, Dion and Dion (1993) found that Asian subjects of both genders view love relationships more in terms of friendship and caring than do women and men of European or Anglo-Celtic backgrounds. The authors argue that this view of love is consistent with the notion of self and others in cultures that emphasize collectivism (see also Ting-Toomey, 1991).

In most cultures, the concepts of gender and sexuality are closely related. The cultural norms about what men and women should look like and how they should behave extends to the realm of sexuality (Diamond & Savin-Williams, 2002). For example, gender appropriate behavior for women usually includes being attracted to men and engaging in sexual relations with men. Thus, a lesbian woman violates this female gender norm by being attracted to and sexually active with other women. By deviating from the female gender norm, she sheds doubt on her "womanhood." If she does not behave like a "real" woman, is she a "real" woman? Conversely, a heterosexual man, who happens to be feminine in his appearance or makes a career choice that is more typical for women in his culture, will likely be perceived as gay. If he is gender atypical in his behavior, it is thought he must also be gender-atypical in his sexuality.

Other sexual minorities, such as transgendered individuals and bisexual youth, face similar challenges. In adolescence, when issues of gender and sexuality become particularly salient, young people may struggle with the expression of their gender identity and sexuality. Deviating from gender norms and/or deviating from sexual norms may have serious social and psychological consequences. Interestingly, the extent of the consequences depends on how strictly gender deviation is viewed in a given cultural context. For example, in traditional Latino cultures that value and expect "machismo" from young men and passivity, subservience, and nurturance from young women, those who deviate from these ideals are stigmatized, ostracized, and sometimes the victims of violence. When strict gender norms are less pervasive in a person's ecological system, mild or temporary deviations from gender norms may be tolerated. This might be the case in some contemporary Northern European countries, in which people hold very egalitarian beliefs about the roles and norms for women and men in society (see Stiles & Gibbons, 1995, earlier in this chapter). Not coincidentally, Scandinavian countries have the most liberal laws concerning sexual minorities.

## ◆ ADULTHOOD

The life tasks individuals encounter in early and middle adulthood can be considered universal. In any culture, adults are faced with responsibilities related to childrearing and providing for themselves and their families. In short, they have to “make a living.” How these responsibilities are distributed and what the settings in which people “make a living” look like depends, in large part, on the individual’s ecological system. Cultural values, socioeconomic status, and family size are just some examples of ecological influences, as well as characteristics of the developmental niche. In this section, we look at the specific ways in which gender influences the lives of adults in different cultural environments.

### **Status and the Division of Labor within the Family**

Based on universal gender-role stereotypes and gender-role socialization, the adult roles of women and men are very different. Throughout history, and in almost all known societies, women take primary responsibility for childrearing and housework, while men are responsible for work outside the home. Industrialization and increasing economic pressures have brought about drastic changes that have affected the exclusive nature of this arrangement. Today, agricultural communities can no longer sustain all their families, and many men have to leave their villages and towns to find work in larger cities. As a result, traditional family structure is disrupted and, along with it, traditional gender roles. Women then find it necessary to seek work outside the home to fulfill some of the tasks the departed men leave behind. Also, in highly industrialized countries, technology has made housework much easier and less time-consuming, but sometimes more expensive. In many cases, these additional financial needs can only be met by an additional income provided by the woman.

Surprisingly (or maybe not so surprising to some), increased participation of women in the workforce has not led to a significant change in gender roles at home. Numerous studies show that men tend to participate more in housework when their spouse works outside the home. However, even if both spouses are employed full-time, childrearing and housework are still the main responsibilities of the woman. Similar patterns are found in families in the United States, Switzerland, Indonesia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and South Korea (Charles & Hopflinger, 1992; Sanchez, 1993).

Kerig, Alyoshina, and Volovich (1993) describe some psychological and social consequences of these changing demands and unchanging gender roles within some Russian families. Russian policies strongly emphasize equality of men and women in the workforce, and the large majority of families are two-income families. However, traditional gender-role socialization puts the burden

of household chores and child care exclusively on women, while men actively focus on their work and career. Women may request that their husbands take more responsibility for the family, but husbands are reluctant to become involved in gender-inappropriate activities and often respond by distancing themselves even further from the family. As a result, wives become more demanding and husbands withdraw more, causing great distress for all involved. The authors point out that “rates of divorce are higher in Russia than in any other industrialized nation except the United States, and that births among ethnic Russians have been rapidly declining” (p. 402).

### **Division of Labor in the Workforce**

In addition to the gendered division of labor in the family, women and men are frequently segregated into different occupations in the labor force. Many occupational fields are either female-dominated or male-dominated. One possible explanation is that those occupations requiring female stereotyped attributes (e.g., nurturance) are female-dominated because women have better skills for that work or simply prefer it. For many women and men, these gender-stereotyped occupations represent an important aspect of their developmental niche. Not surprisingly, in many cultures women tend to be teachers, nurses, or caregivers. Similarly, occupations requiring physical endurance, strength, or assertiveness (e.g., laborer jobs or executive positions) tend to be dominated by males. However, stereotypic gender roles are only one possible explanation for occupational gender segregation.

Occupational fields are also frequently segregated by status. Female-dominated occupations generally have a lower status than male-dominated occupations, regardless of the work involved. For example, activities that involve interpersonal communication and interaction are often associated with women, because they tend to have stronger verbal and interpersonal skills. This helps to explain why more women than men become teachers, therapists, and social workers. Yet, few women are involved at the highest levels in international politics, science, business, or academia, all of which require a great deal of interpersonal and verbal skills. Badal, mentioned in our opening vignette, who prepared to be a youth counselor in India, probably has many more female colleagues than male colleagues, unless this occupation is highly regarded in his culture.

High-status occupations typically are better paid and are associated with access to greater resources, resulting in frequent wage and status gaps between some women and men. As a consequence, women are often economically disadvantaged and dependent on their husbands or other men as financial providers. In fact, it appears that there is a consistent gender difference in how men and women view the relationship between status, money, and pay. Tang (1996) revealed that men in the United States with high money ethic endorsement (MEE—the psychological importance of money)



*In Paslocale, Ecuador, a father and daughter work together making brooms.*  
(© Richard Lord/The Image Works)

allocated significantly more money to the highest position and less money to the lowest positions (creating a large pay differential and clearly linking status with money) than did those to whom money was less important. Women's allocation of money was not affected by their MEE. In a subsequent study, Tang and his colleagues (2000) conducted a cross-cultural comparison of pay differentials (in the United States, Taiwan, and the United Kingdom) as a function of the rater's sex and MEE. Findings showed that Taiwanese allocated more money to different positions than did their British and American counterparts. Men tended to have a significantly higher top/bottom pay differential than women. In another study focusing on the devaluation of women's work, England, Hermsen, and Cotter (2000) found that there is a "wage penalty" for working in occupations that have a higher percentage of women.

Many governments have now established public policies and laws that have led to greater gender equality with regard to material and economic differences (i.e. antidiscrimination employment laws). However, differences in the representation of men and women in occupational fields continue to exist. Maria Charles' and Karen Bradley's (2009) study of forty-four societies revealed a surprising trend: In societies that have "regulated" gender equality, occupations are more segregated by gender than in societies with less institutional gender equity. In particular, in such industrially "advanced" countries, men enter the mathematics/engineering occupations in significantly greater numbers than women. The authors argue that economic independence from



gender inequality (macrosystem) allows individuals the choice to express their ‘innate’ gendered selves as part of a fundamental identity. In the next section we will explore, how the cultural expression of gender reinforces or changes ecological context in which individual growth and development takes place in adult life.

### **Gender Relations in Social Status and Public Policy**

Social and economic stratification is deeply rooted in culture, contributes to gender inequality, and is reflected in relationships within the family. Assuming that economic power equals social power, the family member with the greatest social power will be most dominant within the family and thus be a powerful influence within the microsystem. Asserting this power can mean making financial and social decisions, asserting one’s needs, assigning tasks to other family members, and yielding or denying access to resources.

For several centuries, men generally have had more economic and social power than women. Therefore, they are likely to control and shape interpersonal relationships with a spouse and within the family. While women may manage everyday financial or social affairs, the ultimate power of approval or disapproval for decisions often lies with men, who may choose or not choose to exercise this power. Since these status differences are so pervasive, they are often reinforced by the political institutions present within a culture’s various ecological settings.

Franceur and Noonan (2004) perceive some radical changes in this established world order. They argue that there is evidence for a global “sexual revolution,” which is bound to change the ways in which people relate and shift gradually toward a new gender equality. The authors provide the following examples of changing “gender culture” around the world: (1) In Finland, the popularity of both marriage and cohabitation are declining. Two national surveys, in 1972 and 1993, show that the fastest-growing lifestyle is LAT, couples “living alone together” (in a sexual relationship). In these same surveys, LAT couples report being much happier with their personal and intimate lives than married or unmarried cohabiting couples. Similar trends have been reported in Germany and elsewhere. (2) China has been widely condemned for its one-child-per-family policy, forced abortions, and female infanticide. But because these policies have also created a serious surplus of males, young Chinese women are enjoying an unexpected change in bargaining power and choice in picking the best possible husband. (3) In Latin America, Peruvian women have enthusiastically endorsed a government campaign to make contraception available to all women, especially the poor. In a nation where 90 percent of the people are Catholic and many rural women have ten or more children, Peru’s women



are ignoring the pope's ban on contraception and asserting their right to control their own sexual and reproductive lives. (4) In Algeria, Muslim women are turning to personal advertisements to find mates of their own choice, despite strong family disapproval and censorship by fundamentalist Islamic men. (5) There is a growing tradition of financially established single Italian men, "mammoni," to continue living with their parents into their thirties, forties, and beyond, instead of marrying and moving out on their own. This, plus a birthrate below 1.1 child per fertile woman, are radically changing the traditional Italian extended family. Italian husbands and Catholic bishops complain that the Italian women are not listening to them anymore. So many Italian women, married and unmarried, are using the pill and having abortions, that Italy now has the lowest birthrate of any nation in the world.

From these examples we conclude that gender continues to permeate all levels of the ecological system in adult life. Ultimately, individual development is framed by fundamental beliefs about differences between men and women.

## ◆ LATER ADULTHOOD

As is the case throughout life, the physical, psychological, and social changes in later adult years affect men and women in similar and different ways. Cultural views of aging, gender, and gender relations shape the ecological system in which older men and women develop.

### The Experience of Menopause

A major event for women during these years is the experience of menopause. Since menopause, like menarche, is a universal event, it would be easy to assume that all women experience it in the same way. However, based on our earlier discussions of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, we would expect that cultural values, expectations, and context would contribute strongly to shaping the experience—and they do. For example, in previous decades, Europeans and North Americans, among others, frequently described menopause as a "change of life." Many early television programs stereotyped elderly and middle-aged women as moody, unpredictable, and depressed. The picture of menopause as presented in contemporary print media does not seem to have significantly improved. While the frequency of articles on menopause has increased, the information is often insufficient, treated as a negative experience or disease needing medical treatment, frequently containing contradictions and inconsistencies, and ignoring or giving little attention to such factors as race and ethnicity, lifestyle differences, stress, or aging.

Today, most North Americans and, in fact, people in many other countries view menopause very differently. Women's own expectations have

changed, and for some, menopause is seen as a liberating experience. Part of this new view can be attributed to changing cultural views of aging. For research that views menopause from a contextual analysis, see Anderson (1999).

Robinson (2002) reviewed cross-cultural studies conducted in Israel, North America, Japan, Peru, the Yucatan, and the Greek island of Evia. Results indicate that there are enormous differences in the experience of menopause among women in the same culture and among women in different cultures. The author concludes further that, indeed, menopausal symptoms are the result of not only physical factors but also psychological and cultural influences. From these examples it becomes clear that it is not only the physical change during menopause itself but also the cultural view of menopause that shapes a woman's experience. Is menopause just another "developmental stage" or is menopause an "illness" that can be treated (e.g., with hormone therapy)? If menopause is an "illness" that warrants treatment, should we begin to consider hormone treatment for puberty as well, with its many discomforting symptoms (e.g., acne, mood swings, and change in body shape)?

### Divorce and Widowhood

Men and women in later adulthood, in most cultures and religions, consider marriage to be one of the highest sacraments. However, in any society there will be a number of individuals who do not have a spouse, either because they never married or because they lost their mate through divorce or death.

According to traditional Hindu beliefs, divorce is unacceptable. If men are not content in their marriage, they are allowed to take a second wife. After their wife's death, men are also permitted to remarry immediately. Widowhood for women, on the other hand, carries a strong social stigma. Without her husband, she is considered incomplete and even sinful. She is not allowed to remarry, becomes a social outcast, and simply awaits her own death. As a result, some women choose to burn themselves at their husband's funeral to attain spiritual salvation. **Sati**, or *widow immolation*, is a sacred practice (Kumar & Kanth, 2007). Although the current Indian government strongly discourages this practice, a widow's memory is still held in high regard if she dies within a reasonable time after her husband's death.

Among the Hausa of Northern Nigeria, marriage also plays an important spiritual role. Adults who die while still married are expected to move on to **Lahira**, or *paradise*. Although divorced and widowed adults are stigmatized, they are not met with nearly as much resentment as adults who never marry. Previously married women can still acquire some status by becoming prostitutes and remarrying later, an option denied to women who were never married.

In many Native American societies, a widow secures her livelihood by marrying one of her husband's brothers or another close relative. Divorced women may return to their parents or marry another man. Divorce proceedings are relatively uncomplicated unless wife and husband share a great deal of property or the wife's relatives want to negotiate the return of the bride price paid to the husband. These examples of women in different societies show that even in adulthood, individuals create their own developmental niche in response to cultural norms and expectations associated with, in this case, divorce and widowhood.

When viewing divorce in the larger ecological context, it becomes clear that cultural beliefs about gender roles and gender-typical behavior (macrosystem) shape individual experiences within the family (microsystem). "Divorce is not merely behavior on the microlevel, but is associated with shifting cultures on the macrolevel" (Yodanis, 2005, p. 656). Yodanis argues that the option of divorce, when accepted in society, gives women the power to negotiate equal status in the family. Her study of twenty-two countries revealed that women and men experience more equality in their marriage when divorce is practiced and accepted in their society. In countries that, until recently, outlawed divorce (The Philippines and Ireland) or in which divorce is highly unaccepted (Japan), gender roles within the family tended to be more traditional and unequal in terms of work distribution and decision-making power in the home.

These findings are mirrored in Bulbeck's (2005) description of young people's understanding of gender relations within the larger cultural context. Even though many of the young adults interviewed had not yet established their own family, the cultural beliefs about gender relations within the family were well-established. Respondents from Asian cultures (Japan, Korea, Thailand) tended to emphasize separate roles for men and women within the family. These beliefs were associated with the cultural belief that prescribed gender roles serve the family and society. In contrast, young adults from Australia, the United States, and Canada showed strong support for gender equality in the home based on individual preference.

### **Gender Roles and Status in Old Age**

In traditional societies, age is frequently associated with a gain in community status. Older adults are respected and accepted as leaders who bring with them a wealth of life experience. Furthermore, they are frequently thought to have supernatural powers, and they hold important spiritual and religious responsibilities. Finally, both female and male elders are considered important to the socialization process because they pass on the group's cultural heritage to the next generation. In societies in which status is based on age and role as much as gender, older women may actually gain considerable power, both within their families and in society, once they have broken through the

“seniority” barrier. This may be the case in Asian societies more so than in Western cultures.

Sangree (1992) examined two societies, with a particular focus on older men and women. The Tiriki of Kenya and the Irigwe of Nigeria are two societies that view their elders with great respect and appreciate the wisdom they bring to the society. On closer examination, Sangree discovered it is not seniority alone that leads to status and influence among these elders. A necessary condition for being recognized as an elder is grandparenthood. In order to achieve the highest respect as an older person, one has to have at least three living children. Being accepted as an elder represents a gain in status, particularly for Tiriki women. According to cultural norms, Tiriki women cannot be initiated as adults and are denied important positions in the clan or the village. Moreover, their activities are limited to domestic work and farming. As elders, women achieve considerable power and influence by being involved in community affairs, although their contributions are not publicly recognized.

Among the Irigwe, elder status derives from the cultural belief surrounding a mystical relation between death and birth. The Irigwe believe that the soul of a deceased person will eventually be reincarnated as a newborn. The departure of one soul is essential for the creation of a new life. Elders who are approaching death are held in high esteem because their death ensures the continuation of life.

Although Irigwe women are not granted formal leadership in the form of a public office, they nevertheless play a critically important role in community life. In contrast to Tiriki society, women have more opportunities to excel in certain areas and gain public recognition (e.g., as healers or craftswomen). As grandmothers, they achieve even more status and are held in high regard.

With changes brought about by modernization, the gender roles and status of older adults, as well as of younger adults, have changed, particularly in Irigwe society. Sangree (1992) describes how young educated men are taking over community activities formerly conducted by the male and female elders. Such changes are not characteristic of younger women. They are often too busy with their family responsibilities or limited by their lack of education to compete with men for jobs and status.

Among the Tiriki, male elders retain their influence in some local affairs. The culture has preserved the elder males’ role as an essential agent in the socialization and initiation of younger males. They are also more involved in their sons’ lives since they manage their sons’ property while they are away from home for work. The influence and status of female elders are gradually disappearing, and there are fewer opportunities for them to be involved within the community. Overall, the status of Tiriki individuals in late adulthood and how they are viewed increasingly resemble the view held by other modern cultures.

## ◆ SUMMARY

This chapter discusses the development of women and men across the lifespan. Whereas some gender differences can be viewed from a biological perspective, the emphasis here is on social and cultural forces that contribute to the psychological development of men and women in different societies. In early childhood, prevailing gender stereotypes already influence the socialization of gendered behavior. Cultural customs and arrangements determine the structure and content of social interaction between boys and girls. These interactions become increasingly important during adolescence, when young people are preparing for their roles as adults. Aside from biological maturity, cultural norms determine when a youth may engage in sexual activity. In addition, cultural rules may dictate mate selection as well as acceptable or unacceptable sexual activities. The years of adulthood are characterized by clearly stipulated roles and obligations, many of which are defined by gender. Although many of these roles show great similarities across cultures, the status of men and women and their relationships may differ depending on their cultural environment and their unique developmental niche.

## ◆ STUDY QUESTIONS

- Define the terms “sex” and “gender” and distinguish between them.
- Use biological, evolutionary, and social learning perspectives to explain gender differences that are considered universal (e.g., relative strength, body size, aggression, verbal skills).
- Give examples of how factors at the micro-, exo-, and macro-levels of the ecological system explain cultural differences in gender equality during adulthood.

## ◆ FURTHER READINGS

Caroline B. Brettell & Carolyn F. Sargent. (2004). *Gender in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (4th ed.). New York: Prentice Hall.

This reader introduces learners to the most significant topics in the field of gender—drawing from classic sources as well as from the most recent, diverse literature on gender roles and ideology around the world. It features broad geographical coverage and the most current research available. An extensive range of topics.

John Colapinto. (2000). *As Nature Made Him: The Boy Who Was Raised as a Girl*. New York: HarperCollins.

The story of a couple who arranged for one of their twin sons to undergo sex reassignment. The case, initially proclaimed a success, was considered a landmark in explaining the shaping of human sexual identity. However, thirty years later, the subject tells of his participation in an experiment in psychosexual engineering gone wrong. When informed of his medical history, at age fourteen, the subject decided to live as a male and shares his eventual triumph in asserting his sense of self against his medically and surgically imposed identity. Fascinating reading.

Joanne Eicher & Lisa Ling. (2005). *Mother, Daughter, Sister, Bride: Rituals of Womanhood*. Washington, DC: National Geographic Society.

This book celebrates the defining connections among women, and honors their differences from Quinceañera parties commemorating a Hispanic girl turning fifteen, to pre-wedding henna ceremonies in the Middle East, to American traditions such as the debutante ball, as well as the coming-of-age rituals of Mende girls in Sierra Leone. Illustrated with photographs from the National Geographic archive. A fascinating look at the historical, cultural, emotional, and personal impact of women's rituals and ritual practices.

Leslie Feinberg. (1995). *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to Ru-Paul*. Boston: Beacon Press.

A historical look at the social and cultural constructions of gender. The author's discussion of gender issues, ranging from pink and blue to bathroom taboos to transexuality/transgenderism, opens readers' eyes to the ways in which gender shapes everyday experience.

D. P. Schmidt. (2000). Are Sexual Promiscuity and Relationship Infidelity Linked to Different Personality Traits Across Cultures? Findings from the International Sexuality Description Project. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture* (Unit 6, Chapter 4 at <http://orpc.iaccp.org>) International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology.

Over 17,000 participants responded to self-reported measures of sexuality and personality. Analyses across 58 cultures from 52 nations revealed that romantic relationship infidelity was significantly associated with disagreeableness and low levels of conscientiousness across most cultures. Sexual promiscuity was related to extraversion across many, but not most, cultural regions. Discussion questions focus on patterns of findings and why regional differences in sexuality-personality linkages seem to exist.

Suzzane LaFont. (2002). *Constructing Sexualities: Readings in Sexuality, Gender, and Culture*. New York: Prentice Hall.

This collection introduces readers to a broad range of ideas and theories and encourages critical thinking about the relationships between sexuality, gender, and culture. The readings include descriptions of variations in sexual and gender ideologies, expressions of sexuality, gender diversity, and global issues. Gay rights, transgendered movements, female genital mutilation, male circumcision, AIDS, sex tourism, and other current issues are addressed.

## ◆ DEVELOPMENTAL ANALYSIS

### GENDER AND SEXUALITY

My name is Matilda Skelton, but everyone—thankfully—calls me “Maddi.” I was born on September 17, 1938, in Elfville, Pennsylvania, a small farming community settled by Irish immigrants (population 1734). My life would be very different had I been born a boy or even a girl in another culture with different expectations for women. I have had more freedom and opportunities than women in many other countries. However, as I was growing up, especially during adolescence, I often felt a sense of confusion and lack of direction. I think American society sometimes sends women different messages about what should be most important in life. This is especially true today. Should a young woman focus on marriage and childrearing or on a career? Can she find a balance among these competing interests? I believe she can but it certainly is not easy.

All cultures have gender stereotypes that are established early. Boys and girls are frequently expected to conform to them. This was certainly true when I was growing up. One example is the type of toys children are expected to play with. I had my dolls and cooking sets (to help prepare me to be a mother and housewife), and my brother had his doctor kit and chemistry set (to encourage him to experiment with science and think about a career). Today, boys’ and girls’ toys are less associated with gender, and everyone learns about computers, plays video games, and has their own iPod (and often cell phone, too).

On the other hand, when I was young, my father took me fishing and later taught me how to hunt. Sometimes, I think he wished I’d been a boy, although he never said that. When I was twelve, he had me take Hunter’s Safety. I didn’t want to because my girlfriends weren’t doing it. This is an example of where peers influence gender stereotypes. I am also an avid football fan—unlike many of my female friends. In seventh grade, I wore makeup and skirts. The following year, I changed to jeans and sweatshirts. I was trying to find myself in both extremes and learned I could be both a lady and a tomboy.

My life growing up as a female was quite different from that of my mother. I’ve been able to do so many more things than she could. For example, I went to college, studied business, traveled abroad, married a man from a different culture, am a mom *and* a professor, and take students on foreign study tours to places like Guatemala, Egypt, China, and Norway.

My mother and father knew each other as children and married right after high school. Being raised with a strict Catholic background, she knew little about sex and her own sexuality. Although it was embarrassing at times, my girlfriends and I would read magazines, discuss what we read, and try to

*(continued)*

understand what was happening to our bodies and our changing attitudes toward boys. Naturally, I learned more when I went to college, and when I met my future husband and began to develop an intimate relationship, I learned there are cultural differences in the way people view dating, love, romance, and marriage.

The lives of my son and daughter underwent even more change than I experienced. The same will likely be true for our grandchildren. In terms of gender and sexuality, this is an extremely interesting time in which to live—as you know from your own experiences.





## CULTURE, HEALTH, AND ILLNESS

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*Hiroki Hashimoto is fourteen and lives with his family in the northern city of Akita on the island of Honshu. He attends a private school, where one of his British teachers, Alison Perrin, is concerned about Hiroki's obsessive neatness, extreme shyness, and apparent lack of many close friends. Based on her previous experiences with adolescents in her own country and during a teaching appointment in Canada, she feels he may have an obsessive-compulsive neurosis as well as very poorly developed interpersonal skills. She mentions to a Japanese colleague that she is about to recommend that his parents take him to see a child psychologist. Her colleague explains that Hiroki is more likely showing signs of a rather common disorder in Japan known as taijin-kyofu-sho syndrome (TKS), in which an individual is afraid of offending others while engaged in social situations. Loosely translated as "interpersonal anxiety," or simply "fear of people," TKS appears related to two salient behavior patterns in Japanese culture: an almost universal appearance of shyness or modesty and a great concern with cleanliness.*



*The sun has just appeared over the small village near Huascaran, an extinct volcano and the highest peak in the Andes Mountains, in the Peruvian highlands, where Eric Summerville, an Australian physician, works among the runakuna (native Quechua people). He has just been summoned to the thatched-roof home of a family whose young daughter appears to be suffering from susto, a disorder he has observed many times before among Indian tribes in Peru, Colombia, and Bolivia. Susto (Spanish for fright) is frequently the result of a frightening experience, and its symptoms may include excitability, severe anxiety, depression, rapid heartbeat, and often loss of weight. According to cultural beliefs, it can be caused by a variety of circumstances, including contact with strangers, supernatural spirits, or even "bad air" from cemeteries. The village healer has already made the traditional diagnosis by examining a guinea pig's intestines. Dr. Summerville now assists with the usual treatment of rubbing a variety of*

From Chapter 9 of *Lives Across Cultures: Cross-Cultural Human Development*, Fifth Edition. Harry W. Gardiner, Corinne Kosmitzki. Copyright © 2011 by Pearson Education, Inc. All rights reserved.

*plants over the girl's skin, while the healer performs an animal sacrifice to pacify the Earth, where it is believed the girl's soul is trapped.*



Each of the above vignettes illustrates a unique cultural orientation to the diagnosis and practice of medicine. In both cases, making an accurate diagnosis and planning effective treatment are of chief importance. However, the explanations for the behavior and the etiology (causes) of the symptoms differ, as well as the response to the illness and its treatment. In the case of Hiroki, cultural beliefs about social behavior and expectations within his ecological setting play a major role in his symptoms. In Peru, native beliefs about a variety of frightening circumstances lead to a culturally unique diagnosis and treatment, using indigenous methods that are an extension of the developmental niche and shaped by the ecological system.

#### ◆ ECOLOGICAL CONTEXT: CULTURAL CONCEPTS OF HEALTH AND HEALING

Cultural traditions determine, in large part, how individuals look at their physical and mental health. What is considered healthy behavior in one society may be viewed as unhealthy in another. For example, there are many ways in which people deal with stress and tension (e.g., withdrawal, overt expressions of anger, overeating, or not eating at all). How do you behave when you experience stress? Which approach to dealing with problems would one consider healthy and which unhealthy? The answer varies depending on the culture, developmental niche, and interaction among unique ecocultural systems: the individual (microsystem), who lives and interacts with others in a particular village or neighborhood (mesosystem), and the specific cultural health beliefs and practices that help to shape what goes on within the wider exosystem and macrosystem.

Culture influences attitudes toward health in a variety of ways. A reciprocal process exists in which cultural beliefs, traditions, and progression of knowledge about health shape the views of a particular society; and the views of society, in turn, determine methods and treatments. Frequently, the signs and treatment of an illness are manifested in the beliefs themselves. For example, in remote parts of Sabah and Sarawak in East Malaysia, an individual who exhibits the symptoms of depression would seek the treatment of a village *bomoh* (medicine man) to remove the charms presumably evoked by jealous clans. In contrast, many North Americans view depression as a biological disorder, explainable as a chemical imbalance in the brain and usually treated with antidepressants. You can imagine how the nature and treatment of depression in either culture might be perceived by the other.

This gives rise to an important concept in cross-cultural psychology discussed earlier—the distinction between emic and etic factors. As you may recall, **emic** refers to *culture-specific concepts*, whereas **etic** refers to *culture-general concepts*. In this regard, the symptoms characteristic of certain illnesses in one culture cannot be generalized across cultures. For example while eating disorders are not unusual among young women in Western countries, such disorders may not be as common in developing countries, where the food supply is scarce. Each culture's delicate balance of ecological systems and developmental niches make up the emic values to be considered when diagnosing and treating illness.

### Culture-Bound Syndromes

Medical anthropologists and ethnopsychiatrists have known about seemingly unique forms of psychological illnesses for a long time. These researchers observed (1) symptoms of known illnesses that expressed themselves in unique ways in different cultures and (2) certain illnesses that occurred only among members of a specific cultural group. Because the unique patterns of symptoms did not fit any conventional classification system of disorders, these were largely ignored by the medical community. Finally, in 1994, the fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Society* (DSM-IV) acknowledged the existence of these culture-bound syndromes. The DSM-IV defines culture-bound syndrome as: “recurrent, locality-specific patterns of aberrant and troubling experience that may or may not be linked to a particular DSM-IV diagnostic category. Many of these patterns are indigenously considered to be ‘illnesses,’ or at least afflictions, and most have local names” (p. 844). Box 1 presents examples of some of the better known syndromes. While the inclusion of culture-bound syndromes represents an improvement in the validity of Western diagnostic systems, current researchers suggest that this is just the foundation for the practice of culturally sensitive medicine. For instance, Azhar and Varma (2000) suggest that a new form of psychotherapy could be used to treat culture-bound syndromes (*koro*, *amok*) in Malaysia. This treatment is based on Western techniques of cognitive therapy, but includes culture-specific religious beliefs and practices to reduce symptoms and achieve overall well-being.

### Medical Diagnosis Across Cultures

The emic-etic distinction is germane to another important issue in culture and health—namely, the reliability and validity of diagnostic tests and measurement. Before making a diagnosis, physicians and other health professionals need to consider the medical criteria on which they base their treatment decisions. Often, doctors trained in Western societies use their familiar inventories and diagnostic criteria to evaluate medical conditions in patients from non-Western societies, with a resulting misdiagnosis. The emic- or culture-specific

**BOX 1**
**CULTURE-BOUND SYNDROMES  
AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISORDERS**

How individuals view their mental and physical health is determined, in part, by cultural traditions; for example, what is considered healthy in one society may be seen as unhealthy in another. While psychological disorders can be found in all cultures, the ways in which they are formed and expressed appear to be highly influenced by cultural belief systems, and shaped by cultural factors.

**China**

*Koro*, found primarily in China (as far back as 3000 B.C.) and some other South and East Asian countries, is associated with acute anxiety involving the fear that one's genitals (the penis in a man and the vulva and nipples in women) are shrinking and retracting into the body and may result in death. Chinese folk culture provides some insight into the syndrome's origins, which can be found in fears about nocturnal emissions and impotence. These fears originated in the traditional Chinese beliefs about the balance of *yin* (female) and *yang* (male) humors, which held that during masturbation or nocturnal emissions, an unhealthy loss of *yang* was thought to occur and to place an individual in an unbalanced condition.

*Koro* has been identified primarily in younger men, twenty-one to forty years of age. It is believed that guilt and anxiety arise out of real or imagined sexual excesses. People with *koro* demonstrate typical anxiety symptoms, such as sweating, breathlessness, and heart palpitations. Men with the disorder have been known to use mechanical devices, such as chopsticks, to try to prevent the penis from retracting into the body. Reassurance by medical professionals that the genitals are not retracting often puts an end to *koro* episodes, and the disorder passes with time. Most cases, however, are handled by traditional medical or folk healers outside of the established health care system.

**Japan**

*Taijin-kyofu-sho syndrome* (TKS) is characterized by an excessive fear and anxiety that a person will behave in ways that will embarrass or offend other people (for example, blushing, emitting odors, staring inappropriately, or presenting improper facial expressions), and results in social withdrawal and avoidance. Affecting primarily young Japanese men, the syndrome is believed to be related to an emphasis in Japanese culture on not embarrassing others as well as deep concerns about issues of shame.

Upon examining the symptoms of TKS and using a Western diagnostic system, patients with TKS would typically be diagnosed as having anxiety reactions, obsessive-compulsive reactions, or social phobias. Traditional therapy for

**BOX 1 CONTINUED**

TKS occurs in the context of a ritual setting and includes physiological applications (sweating and massage), behavioral restrictions (diet), and social support.

**Korea**

*Shin-byung* (a divine illness) is a possession syndrome often occurring in the course of a prolonged psychosomatic illness. People believe they are possessed by a dead ancestor and, through a dream or a hallucination, are persuaded to become a shaman, after which the patient becomes “cured” of the ailment. The occurrence of *shin-byung* is reported to be decreasing.

**India**

*Dhat* is a disorder affecting Indian males and involves intense fear or anxiety over the loss of semen through ejaculations or through nocturnal emissions. Some men also believe, incorrectly, that semen mixes with urine and is excreted by urinating. In Indian culture, semen is considered to be the elixir of life, on both the physical and mystical sense. There is a popular belief that loss of semen drains a man of his vital natural energy, while its preservation guarantees health and longevity. Loss of semen through masturbation, excessive sexual intercourse, or nocturnal emission is believed to lead to weakness. The most common symptoms of *dhat* are fatigue, weakness, body aches, severe headaches, depression, anxiety, loss of appetite, and suicidal feelings. Indian males believe that this is caused by heated foods, a fiery constitution, sexual excesses, and the use of intoxicants. A “cooling diet,” “cooling medications,” and baths are recommended. A tonic may also be given to increase sperm production (Chadda & Ahuja, 1990).

**Nigeria**

“*Missing genitals*” is a syndrome that has been reported in Nigeria. The victim of this syndrome, typically a man, might exchange greetings by shaking hands with another man and is suddenly overcome by fear that the genitals have disappeared. It is usually claimed that supernatural forces have been invoked to make the genitals disappear. While objective examination of the genitals reveals that they are intact, pointing this out to the victim does not convince him (Sijuwola, 1995).

**Latino Culture**

*Susto* (“magical fright”) is found in some Latino cultures, primarily among the Quechua-speaking Indians of the Andes. It is triggered by a frightening experience, in which the soul is thought to separate from the body and become trapped on earth, and the person falls to the ground. Symptoms include loss of appetite and weight, physical weakness, restless sleep, depression, introversion, and apathy. By looking at the intestines of a guinea pig, a healing expert

(continued)

**BOX 1 CONTINUED**

makes the diagnosis and then attempts to appease the earth through sacrifices so that the soul will return to the body.

**Native American Culture**

*Amok*, a type of dissociative episode or a sudden change in consciousness or self-identity, is found in traditional Puerto Rican and Navajo cultures in the West. It is marked by a violent or aggressive outburst followed by a period of brooding, often precipitated by a perceived slight or insult. The person, who sometimes experiences amnesia, returns to his or her usual state of functioning following the episode. In the West, the expression “running amuck” refers to an episode of losing oneself and running around in a violent frenzy.

*Windigo*, also known as *witiko*, is a rare, culture-bound disorder reported among some North American Indian tribes, including the Cree and Ojibwa. It is characterized by symptoms of melancholia and a delusion of transformation into a *witiko* or man-eating monster, who either has a heart of ice or vomits ice, and who will turn the victim into a homicidal cannibal. Cannibalism seldom, if ever, occurs. Suicidal ideation to avoid acting on the cannibalistic urges may take place (Trimble, Manson, Dinges, & Medicine, 1984).

*Source:* Adapted from *Infusing Culture into Parenting Issues: A Supplement for Psychology Instructors* by Vicki Ritts, 2000, unpublished manuscript, St. Louis Community College. Reprinted by permission.

values and beliefs that are part of a particular doctor’s ecocultural perspective cannot be readily applied in diagnosing and treating people raised in a culturally different developmental niche. Accurate assessment should take into consideration the beliefs, values, and perceptions of the patient and doctors should employ culture-specific criteria when diagnosing illnesses.

In an interesting study focusing on illness beliefs, Cook (1994) asked 182 adult Chinese, Indian, and Anglo-Celtic Canadians about their beliefs concerning chronic illness and how they should be treated. He found that each ethnic group viewed the causes and treatment differently, depending on geographical orientation, generation, and age. For example, older first- or second-generation Chinese emphasized a more traditional, spiritual dimension to help explain and treat physical illness, whereas younger Chinese tended to look to biomedical intervention.

When individuals are misdiagnosed, their health generally deteriorates even more. There is little or no relief because treatment is completely ineffective. The chances of this occurring are greatest when physicians and health care professionals from one cultural orientation treat individuals from another. For example, in 1985, more than one hundred Cuban refugees were initially

rejected from applying for U.S. citizenship, because a medical review board composed entirely of American psychiatrists diagnosed them as having antisocial personality disorder. However, this diagnosis was overturned after an official appeal was made to a second medical board composed of physicians and psychiatrists from several different countries. Many of the psychiatrists serving on the initial screening board subsequently admitted not being aware of crucial ethnic and cultural differences when they made their original diagnosis.

Lisa Beardsley (1994) has outlined several reasons for misdiagnoses. A first reason is the use of clinical manuals (e.g., the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*, Fourth Edition, DSM-IV) in societies significantly different from the ones for which they were originally intended. For example, while Chinese and American psychiatrists largely agree on some clinical evaluations, such as schizophrenia, they disagree on others, including depression and anxiety disorders.

A second reason for misidentifying a health problem frequently centers on the difference in definition between disease and illness behavior. According to Beardsley, **disease** is a *biological process*, whereas **illness behavior** is a *psychological experience and the social expression of disease* (p. 281). She goes on to point out that “cultural variables interact with biological processes, and as a result, there is overlap between culture-specific (emic) and culture-general (etic) features of a disease” (p. 281).

Finally, the use of culturally biased instruments and tests may contribute to misdiagnosis. For example, standardized intelligence tests, such as the Stanford-Binet and the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC), and personality inventories, such as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), were developed for use with specific American populations and even when carefully translated are not always appropriate for use in other cultures. Consequently, use of these instruments may result in a patient or client receiving ineffective treatment. For example, one of the authors (Gardiner) once had a Chinese student come to his office in tears because she had been given the results of her MMPI, and the computerized analysis indicated she “demonstrates bizarre behavior and should be institutionalized and treated immediately.” Knowing the cultural specificity of certain items on this test used to assess “psychopathological tendencies,” I was able to calm her down by showing her how the answers she gave, while reasonable and healthy for her particular culture, were considered inappropriate and unhealthy when given by someone born and raised in the American culture. I strongly recommended that the personnel in the college counseling office, none of whom had had cross-cultural training, not use this instrument as a measure of anything with international students. As Brislin (1990) aptly states, “It is decidedly a creation of the ‘Western’ view of etiology and psychiatric classification (and is, therefore, culture-bound); its original normative samples came from small, rural parts of Minnesota (in the United States); and there is little or no ‘theory’ guiding its cross-cultural use” (p. 69). Nevertheless, the MMPI is available in more than one hundred languages and, since the incident mentioned above,



has undergone revision and is seen by some as worthy of cross-cultural attention (Butcher, 2006). However, we still agree with Brislin, who argues for caution if employing this instrument, because “its misuse can lead to terrible errors and tragic consequences” (1990, p. 70).

The World Health Organization (WHO) has as its goal the promotion of health and prevention of misdiagnoses, as well as the provision of medical services to countries throughout the world. One of WHO’s major efforts is the Mental Health Program, which is aimed at protecting and promoting mental health. According to Sartorius (1994), this program consists of four parts: “(1) Mental Health programme formulation and evaluation, (2) psychosocial and behavioral factors affecting health and development, (3) organization of services for the prevention and treatment of mental and neurological illnesses, and (4) biomedical research on mental functioning in health and disease” (p. 262). Developing guidelines for improving mental health care and training mental health professionals are also integral parts of this program. As a result of these and other efforts, health care professionals are becoming more culturally sensitive (see Box 2).

Success in these efforts requires an understanding of human development from a cross-cultural perspective. The focus of this chapter, therefore, is to investigate how health is mediated by cultural factors across the lifespan. (For a thought-provoking and somewhat controversial discussion of how western cultures often negatively influence the diagnosis and treatment of psychological disorders throughout the world, see Watters, 2010.)

### **Illness, Stress, and Coping**

Illness, at any age and in any ecological system, creates considerable stress. We know today that stressful life events affect physical health in complex ways. Behavior, cognition, and emotion interact with the central nervous system and the endocrine system in ways that might suppress or boost the immune system (Tosevski & Milovancevic, 2006), thus setting the stage for optimal health or risk of illness.

The ability to cope with the stress of illness is not only important for survival, but it is also the foundation for growth and change. You may know people in your life who experienced a seemingly devastating illness at some point in their lives. Yet, they were able to adapt to their limitations and develop abilities and strategies that allowed them to achieve goals. One could argue that coping with and adapting to their illness allows them to grow—they grow not despite the illness but because of it. Hampel and colleagues (2006) showed that children and adolescents with chronic health conditions coped with everyday stressors (e.g., tension with family or friends, school-related issues) better than their healthy counterparts. Have you or anyone in your family had to deal with a serious illness? What was done? What was the outcome?

Perhaps adjusting to the stresses related to a chronic illness has helped these children to develop coping strategies for stressors in other areas of their



**BOX 2**
**TRAINING HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS  
TO BE CULTURALLY SENSITIVE**

Although the world's 6 billion inhabitants live in 191 countries and speak more than 6000 languages, relatively little is known about the effects of culture on health care. In the United States, emergency rooms are treating increasing numbers of individuals from ethnically and culturally diverse backgrounds. For example, in 2010 it was estimated that there were more than 35 million legal immigrants living in the United States, along with approximately 12 million to 20 million illegal immigrants, many speaking little or no English. In an article in *Pediatrics* (2000), Flores emphasizes the importance of physicians becoming more sensitive to cultural diversity, and provides a framework for understanding the clinical consequences of culture. The specific impact of five cultural components (normative cultural values, language, folk illnesses, parent/patient beliefs, and provider practices) is examined, along with practical solutions to ensure that culturally sensitive care is provided to patients. Most importantly, Flores proposes a model for cultural competency in health care, which can be used to guide clinicians in interactions with any cultural group. Today, hospital staff are taking steps to ensure greater awareness and better understanding of cultural differences. Failure to do this will only increase the possibility of misdiagnosis, as in the case of a Mexican peasant woman who invented her symptoms because she was too embarrassed to describe her real problem (rectovaginal fistula or *an abnormal connection between the rectum and the vagina*). Needless to say, such misunderstanding not only jeopardizes patients' health but also opens up the possibility of a lawsuit. Thus, many physicians are taking courses in multiculturalism and are enlisting the help of relatives or friends of patients when making daily rounds. In New York, a Chinatown outreach team from St. Vincent's Hospital is learning about the use of herbal remedies to treat ailments of the elderly. Also, folk healers are recruited at University Hospital in Minneapolis to help serve the large community of Laotian Hmong refugees.

lives. The Chinese view of stress emphasizes that stress presents a crisis and an opportunity (for growth) at the same time. In other words, stress is part of life, and adaptation is growth. Yet, individuals and cultural groups differ in how susceptible they are to stress and illness and how they cope with these situations. Ecological factors that shape responses to illness include differences in access to health care, social stigma, and parental modeling of illness behavior. The focus of this chapter, therefore, will be to investigate how health, illness, and response to illness are mediated by cultural factors across the lifespan.

## ◆ INFANCY

Professionals in today's health care delivery systems see infant care as one of their major challenges. Technological advances allow premature and extremely low-birth-weight babies that would not have survived a decade ago to live and grow into healthy children and adults. But the process is not always easy and success or failure frequently depend on cultural factors.

### Risks to Infant Health

Physical development during the prenatal period is critical, and any number of environmental factors can adversely affect this development and increase the odds of giving birth to a child with birth defects. Environmental toxins (aluminum, lead, carbon dioxide) or **teratogens** (*agents such as chemicals or diseases*) can contribute to the development of physical and mental abnormalities. For example, even a small amount of alcohol consumed during a critical period of pregnancy may increase chances of giving birth to a child with physical and cognitive abnormalities. Known as **fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS)**, these abnormalities include an unusually small head, low birth weight, facial deformities, neurological impairments, and signs of impaired intellectual functioning. While it is difficult to know the precise number of cases of FAS throughout the world, Abel and Sokol (1987) report that in comparative studies conducted in Australia, North America, and several European countries, approximately one in every 500 infants is born with the disorder. The result is that FAS contributes significantly to the number of children suffering from mental disabilities. Along these same lines, other studies have shown that if an expectant mother uses **crack cocaine** (*a concentrated form of cocaine*) or another addictive drug such as heroin or methadone, it will have the same effect on her fetus that it has on her. The developing fetus is most vulnerable to teratogens during the third to sixth week after conception (the critical period), when the central nervous system, heart, arms, and legs are developing.

The most observable indicators of health during the early years of life are the relative increases in height and weight. In this regard, the importance of nutrition during infancy cannot be overemphasized. Nutrition affects changes in physical stature, brain development, and motor skill mastery, as well as other developments. Most of us have seen news reports of chronic malnutrition in many parts of the world. According to UNICEF (2006), 30,000 children die each day in developing countries from infection and malnutrition due to poverty. This is more than 10 million children each year. In fact, the major cause of child mortality is the malnutrition and dehydration caused by diarrhea.

The incidence of malnutrition among young children, and the short-term and long-term effects of physical and psychological trauma associated

with it, received worldwide attention following the December 2004 tsunami in Asia and the conflict in Sudan, where thousands of children with severe malnourishment were admitted to therapeutic feeding programs in Darfur since May 2004.

In industrialized countries, bottlefeeding is frequently preferred to breastfeeding, in part, because it allows women to pursue individualistic goals and to engage in professional activities. As developing nations become more technologically advanced and increasingly industrialized, there is a reduction in breastfeeding. In some situations this has resulted in many mothers, especially those living at the poverty level, diluting baby formulas and contributing to their infants' already deficient nourishment.

On a more positive note, the early effects of malnutrition can, in some cases, be lessened and even turned back. For example, Barrett, Radke-Yarrow, and Klein (1982) conducted a follow-up study on a group of Guatemalan children who had been participants in an earlier investigation carried out by the Institute of Nutrition of Central America and Panama (INCAP). These children, suffering from the effects of severe malnutrition, were provided with



*Breastfeeding young infants is commonly practiced throughout the world.*

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caloric or nutritional supplements during the first several years of their development. As a result, they were significantly more active, physically as well as socially, than children who did not receive such supplements. In a related study involving malnourished Colombian infants, those who received regular food supplements along with home visits were taller and heavier than a comparable group who had not been given such treatment. The former group also demonstrated slightly higher ability in cognitive and social areas. The same reversibility of the effects could be observed in children who spent their first years of life in Romanian orphanages, suffering from physical neglect and malnutrition (Rutter & the ERA Study Team, 1998). The children had been adopted by families in Great Britain, where their environmental conditions improved dramatically. Researchers studied the children's physical and cognitive development at age four and found that most Romanian children had caught up physically with their British counterparts. This was especially true for children who had been adopted before the age of six months.

## ◆ CHILDHOOD

### Childhood Obesity

Over the past three decades, health care professionals in the United States have become alarmed about the growing problem of obesity in middle childhood. This topic has important implications for the consideration of physical growth and development.

Obesity in middle childhood can lead to serious physical and emotional problems later in life. It can cause considerable respiratory and cardiovascular difficulties and can trigger excessive dieting and consequent complications. In addition, children often reject and ridicule their overweight peers, which negatively affects their self-esteem. **Obesity** is generally considered to be *body weight that is 20 percent or more over the recommended weight for one's age, gender, and body type*. Even with all the attention given to the importance of keeping one's weight under control, research shows that the incidence of obesity among children has increased dramatically within the last several decades. Cole and Cole (2001) point to a 50 percent increase among six- to eleven-year-old children and almost as large an increase among twelve- to seventeen-year-old adolescents. The greatest increase for children in the United States has been among Mexican American and African American children and for those living in low-income families.

What causes obesity? Many researchers believe it is caused by a combination of genetic and sociocultural factors as demonstrated in the Human Genome Project. However, this genetic explanation cannot explain obesity entirely; various social factors must also be taken into consideration. For one thing, children often get mixed signals in their culture. In North American society, there is a

preoccupation with physical appearance. Being tall and slim are seen as acceptable forms of beauty. Furthermore, children are likely to observe their parents worrying about overeating and gaining weight. This, in turn, can add to children's confusion about how much food they should eat. There is also a tendency in some cultures for parents to overfeed their children in infancy and early childhood. This is often done in an effort to pacify restless children and as a way to cope with parents' busy schedules. Given the amount of food served in many family restaurants—the “all you can eat” specials—it is not surprising that many overweight children exist, particularly in North America.

Another social factor that contributes to obesity is lack of exercise. This may seem paradoxical, since we think of children as running around and being involved in lots of activities. But while many children are active, a substantial number of children stay at home spending many hours taking care of younger siblings, playing video games, watching television, or, more recently, “surfing” the Internet. As a result, many school-age children do not get nearly enough exercise. Kimm and her colleagues (2005), in a nine-year long longitudinal study of over 2000 white and African American girls, from ages nine to ten to eighteen to nineteen, reported that they had a pronounced decline in physical activity while their rate of obesity doubled. The authors recommended that even modest amounts of activity during adolescence could help prevent obesity development and the onset of adult chronic diseases. They also stressed that this problem is not confined to North America but, in fact, represents a “global obesity epidemic.”

### **Childhood Mental Health**

Concerns about mental health are not commonly associated with “childhood.” Nonetheless, in recent years it has become clear that several psychological and developmental disorders may first occur during this early life phase, among them multiple personality disorder, depression, autism, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Viewed from an ecological systems perspective, culture plays a role in how childhood disorders are diagnosed and interpreted within the social context. Studies of autism, depression, and ADHD seem to suggest that, overall, mental health professionals in various countries agree on and correctly recognize the symptoms of these disorders. While reliable diagnostics can help identify these illnesses, ecological factors influence how family, peers, teachers, and health professionals interpret and deal with these disorders. Teachers, for example, are central in the diagnosis of ADHD, because one criterion requires that the symptoms present themselves in at least two different contexts. One context is home; the other is usually school. A study by Jacobson (2002) showed that teachers in the United States and the United Kingdom correctly identified ADHD-typical behaviors, but the two groups differed significantly in what they considered “appropriate” classroom behaviors.

The cultural differences in these children's ecological systems bring into question the interpretation of some ADHD behaviors as "disordered." Another example of the interaction between ecological systems and a child's mental health status is Pribilsky's discussion of the culture-specific disorder "nervios" (2001). This illness occurs among children living in the southern Ecuadorian Andes Mountains. Children suffer from a variety of depression-like symptoms, including melancholy and anger. A common trigger of the illness is children's separation (mainly) from their fathers, who usually migrate to the United States for economic reasons. The author argues that this childhood disorder is clearly defined by changes in lifestyles, family structure, and migration, all representing disturbing changes in the child's ecological system.

### **Ecological Influences on Early Coping Behavior**

The ecological conditions in which a child grows up set the stage for many potential health risks and stressors. These conditions include physical factors such as climate, hygienic conditions, and access to vaccinations and medication.

In addition to physical settings and resources, parental characteristics and family dynamics are a very salient aspect of the early ecological system, which influences the ways in which children perceive stress and illness and how they adapt to it. Findings from a landmark longitudinal study conducted by Werner (1989) provide important information on this topic. Beginning in the 1950s, more than 650 infants born on the Hawaiian island of Kauai were monitored for cognitive and emotional development throughout childhood and adulthood. While most were born without complications and were raised in supportive homes, a substantial number experienced a variety of difficulties, including some perinatal stress and prematurity. The researchers reported that children raised in supportive and nurturing homes showed more competence than those who were not reared in such environments. Not surprisingly, they also found that premature and low-birth-weight infants developed significantly more slowly when their prenatal problems were combined with impoverished living conditions, dysfunctional family situations, and inadequate parenting. The premature infants who made the greatest progress tended to grow up in families with a great deal of physical stimulation, interaction with other family members, and supportive caregiving.

More recently, developmental researchers acknowledge that parenting influences children's coping in multiple phases of the coping process: how and when children may be exposed to a stressor, the appraisal of an event as stressful, modeling stress behavior, and modeling coping behavior (Eisenberg and Valiente, 2004; Power, 2004). This argument seems to gain some support from Chen and Kennedy (2005), who studied children's coping in different cultural environments. They learned that children of different ethnicities (the



*Latin American street children help each other survive the challenges of everyday life.*

(© Timothy Ross/The Image Works)

sample consisted of European American, Chinese American, and Mexican American children within the United States, and Taiwanese children in their native country) reported different types of stressors, and they also preferred and used different coping strategies. The authors relate these differences to parental characteristics, family dynamics, and early socialization.

## ◆ ADOLESCENCE

Writing about the hurried child, Elkind (1988) characterizes American youth as growing up too fast too soon and states that “like Superman, Superkid has spectacular powers and precocious competence even as an infant. This allows us to think that we can hurry the little powerhouse with impunity” (p. xii).

The pressure to grow up affects most children at some point, but each culture has its own beliefs about when this is supposed to occur. In some societies, the process is gradual, whereas in others it is abrupt. No matter how smooth the transition might be, it brings with it challenges, possibilities, and health concerns.

**Adolescence**, *the time between childhood and adulthood*, was initially called a period of “storm and stress” by the “father” of modern adolescent psychology, G. Stanley Hall (1904), who described the frequent mood swings and conflict thought to characterize the period. Today, most lifespan psychologists view adolescence as a continuous process rather than a fixed stage in the life cycle.



Adolescence is nevertheless a complex concept and is shaped by socio-cultural beliefs and historical events. For example, just before the start of the twentieth century in the United States, the concept of adolescence did not exist. Young persons were simply expected to take on adult responsibilities and contribute to the welfare of the family as soon as they were physically able to do so. Over time, however, this idea changed, and societies (especially those in the West) became more accepting of adolescence as a distinct stage in adult preparation. In recent years, the period of adolescence has shown signs of expanding so that children enter it earlier and stay in it longer, in some cases well into their early to mid-twenties. For many, biological changes during the adolescent years can be enormously stressful. For example, hormonal changes associated with puberty are frequently accompanied by fluctuations in social and emotional development. For many adolescents, these changes produce only minimal health risks, although, for others, they can contribute to serious health problems, including eating disorders or alcohol and drug addiction. Adolescence is also the time when many severe adult mental disorders begin to manifest themselves.

### Eating Disorders

Over the years, the topic of adolescent health has taken on new dimensions in cross-cultural human development. Because of the impact childhood illnesses can have on adult development (e.g., obesity and diabetes), international health organizations and relief agencies have devoted increasing attention to the identification of physical and mental illnesses among the world's adolescents. Today, a growing health concern among many professionals is the dramatic rise in the incidence of eating disorders, especially in highly industrialized societies.

**Anorexia nervosa** is *an eating disorder*, found primarily among young adolescent girls, *characterized by loss of appetite and extreme loss of weight*. In severe cases, hospitalization becomes necessary, menstruation may stop, and an individual may lose 15 to 25 percent or more total body weight. It is estimated that between 5 percent and 15 percent of anorexic girls die of this disorder each year. By contrast, adolescents suffering from **bulimia nervosa**, again typically young women, *eat extremely large amounts of food, then purge it all by means of self-induced vomiting*. The aim is not to lose or gain weight but to maintain a specific weight.

While in some societies stoutness is associated with good health and prosperity, in others it is not. For example, in parts of Southeast Asia, a plump waistline suggests abundance, wealth, and good fortune. It has been reported that young women of the nomadic Moors of Mauritania or the Annang of Nigeria are force fed because large women are considered the most desirable (Brink, 1989; Cassidy, 1991). On the other hand, in North America, being slim and fit is important, whereas being overweight can be embarrassing. An obsession with being thin appears to be especially common among young women. In light of the disproportionately higher incidents of





*Anorexia nervosa affects many young women throughout the world.*  
(© Ed Quinn/CORBIS)

eating disorders in young women as opposed to men, gender is considered a “risk-factor” for eating disorders. Have you or anyone you know suffered from an eating disorder? What did you do about it?

### ***Cultural Variations in Anorexia and Bulimia***

Both of these eating disorders can have serious adverse effects on one’s personal health. But just how common are these disorders in countries throughout the world? Among the cross-cultural studies looking at this problem, findings reveal two predominant trends: one, eating disorders occur universally and two, fewer eating disorders and less dissatisfaction with body image occur in Asian, Middle Eastern, South Americans, and African cultures, compared to European, North American, and Australian cultures (Miller and Pumariega, 2001). These consistent results over the past decades indicate a relationship between eating disorders and Western cultural ideals of thinness that young women (and men) feel they need to achieve. A particularly interesting example of the desire for

thinness in American society was the celebration of the one-hundredth birthday of the Statue of Liberty. A new coin was issued with a likeness designed to resemble the original, with one exception: Lady Liberty's figure on the new coin had been "slimmed down" to more closely represent the culturally popular Western ideal of feminine thinness (Nichter & Nichter, 1991).

Are eating disorders culture-bound syndromes? Keel and Klump (2003) conducted a thorough review of 1190 published studies on eating disorders in non-Western cultures. They found that occurrences of anorexia nervosa were reported in every non-Western region of the world, while bulimia was restricted to cultures, which had been exposed to various Western influences. The authors conclude that these two disorders are distinct in their etiologies (origin and development of a disease): anorexia, a universal illness, appears strongly influenced by genetic predisposition, while bulimia originates from the psychological response to cultural expectations. In short, "culture-as-a-risk-factor" seems to be more of a consideration when diagnosing and treating bulimia.

Pike and Borovoy (2004) agree with the notion that culture changes are, in part, the cause for eating disorders (both anorexia and bulimia), but they also contend that culture-specific influences play a particular role in the way the illnesses express themselves and the way they need to be treated. In their study of Japanese women, they describe the histories of two young women with eating disorders, Tomoko and Hiroko. The authors conclude that the eating disorders are rooted in specific Japanese cultural expectations regarding gender roles and beauty ideals. For example, in Hiroko's case, she experiences a conflict between being a "perfect" wife to her alcoholic husband and the desire to disassociate from him. Anorexia nervosa serves as a way to make herself be the perfect wife (by seemingly meeting a beauty ideal of thinness) and, at the same time, become ill and detach from her husband so that she would not be required to fulfill her role as a sexual partner (Pike and Borovoy, 2004, p. 523). In another example, that places anorexia nervosa in a cultural context Banks' exhaustive review of the literature notes an interesting link between anorexia nervosa and **asceticism**, or the religious *practice of self-denial, used to achieve greater spiritual awareness* (1992). In a religious context, symptoms of eating disorders may be expressed in rituals of fasting and vomiting. An interesting recent study of this type was conducted by Ali and Maharajh (2004), in which an eighteen-year-old Islamic student, enrolled in a Roman Catholic Convent, was exposed to ambivalent religious values, which appeared to act as an etiological factor in her development of this disorder.

### **Culture and Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)**

As adolescents become sexually active, they are more likely to acquire sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) than any other age group. One sexually transmitted disease in particular, acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), which

is caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), has become a critically important international health issue. Since 1981, when AIDS was first diagnosed in Los Angeles, people with HIV have been found in more than 169 countries. **AIDS** is a disease that attacks the body's immune system, leaving an individual weak and susceptible to infections that sometimes prove fatal. With an increasing number of adolescents becoming sexually active at younger ages and large numbers engaging in unsafe practices, there is serious concern that many have become infected with the HIV virus and may die of AIDS when they reach the third decade of their lives (Harvard Mental Health Letter, 1999).

Discussion of HIV and the AIDS epidemic should be made within the context of culture and how it influences the interpretation, diagnosis, and treatment of the disease. In an unusually persuasive article on the relationship between culture and the media's influence on HIV and AIDS in Asia, Wolffers (1997) stresses that culture is not a passive entity but rather a dynamic process within which members of a society are continuously acting on their needs and interpreting what they see and experience. One of the major sources of cultural influence throughout the world is the media. In Southeast Asia, the media has devoted considerable time and energy to informing and educating the public about the causes and transmission of HIV. However, as Wolffers points out, many local newspapers have a policy of not printing information about HIV and its relationship to sexual behavior, because this sometimes conflicts with religious and cultural beliefs. Instead, in an effort to combat the illegal use and trafficking of drugs, emphasis is often placed on the occurrence of HIV and AIDS among drug users and their use of dirty needles. The concern, as Wolffers points out, is that under these circumstances many people, particularly those who are young, uneducated, and living at the poverty level, will not be adequately informed about the potential sources of contracting the virus, and that this ignorance will substantially contribute to the increasingly large number of AIDS cases throughout the world.

## ◆ ADULTHOOD

The transition from adolescence to adulthood is more gradual than that from childhood to adolescence. Exactly when an individual becomes an adult is not always clear, and there is likely to be just as much variation within cultures as there is among cultures.

### **Mental Health Issues**

In addition to the effects of stress, other mental health issues concern adults. Among these are depression and schizophrenia. While it is not our intention to provide a comprehensive analysis of psychopathology in adulthood, we examine some of the different approaches to viewing these illnesses from a cross-cultural perspective.

### ***Depression***

As already noted, every culture has its own beliefs regarding the causes and treatment of illness and stress. This is true for depression as well, and once again, there is often more variation in interpretation within cultures than among cultures. For example, in the United States, individuals react in many different ways when hearing that someone is experiencing depression. Responses may range from “There’s nothing to worry about, he’s just a little moody these days. He’ll soon be fine” to “She’s had a long history of serious depression, just like her mother and father. It seems to run in the family.” Because the term tends to be used so freely in everyday conversation and in the media, it is sometimes difficult to recognize the symptoms of depression.

**Depression** is a serious psychological disorder involving periods of sadness and other negative feelings, such as hopelessness, despair, sleep disturbance, and loss of energy. Cultural variations in beliefs about depression and other illnesses have important implications for the health status of individuals worldwide. Health authorities have become increasingly alarmed by the growing number of reported cases of depression among adults. It is estimated that at least one hundred million people around the world experience the symptoms of depression each year (Douki & Tabbane, 1996). This figure is expected to rise as people live longer and more people are exposed to chronic stress. It is also feared that the sudden exodus of families migrating to new countries and abandoning native customs and traditions, as well as the breakup of the extended family, will



*Adolescents experiment with smoking and drinking at increasingly younger ages.*  
(© Photofusion Picture Library/Alamy)

result in increased incidences of depression in younger people. Some experts worry that this will lead to greater consumption of alcohol and the abuse of drugs, which will only intensify the depression. Obviously, the magnitude of this problem presents enormous public health concerns.

Since depression has varying emotional, physical, and behavioral symptoms, it is common for many cases to go undetected. For this and other reasons, diagnosing and treating depression among young adults continue to be major problems for health care professionals in many cultures. In Western countries, depression is described in terms of being sad, disconnected, and withdrawn. Sometimes, these are accompanied by somatic complaints, such as headaches, stomach cramps, or nausea. However, in parts of India and South Africa, depression is described in quasi-spiritual or metaphysical terms—"suffering of the spirit" (Douki & Tabbane, 1996). Recent findings suggest that depression in some developing countries is gradually beginning to mimic depressive symptoms seen in the West. For example, an epidemiological study done among adults in Tunisia revealed that of the five thousand patients sampled, most registered the same complaints concerning depression as their Western counterparts. Rapid socioeconomic development and mass urbanization were two of the reasons given to explain the depressive symptoms of young Tunisians (Douki & Tabbane, 1996). Thus, it appears that while there are certain culture-specific characteristics associated with depression, there also are several universal features.

In 1983, the World Health Organization (WHO) conducted a cross-national study of patients in Canada, Japan, Switzerland, and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Findings revealed a cluster of core depressive symptoms, including long periods of sadness, lack of energy and affect, inability to concentrate, feelings of inadequacy, and loss of self-esteem. As Douki and Tabbane (1996) indicate, while the frequency and extent of reported depressive cases may vary among cultures, depression is a major universal problem that usually requires treatment.

In China, depressive episodes and stress-related disorders among adults are often accompanied by somatization. This has also been reported in parts of Latin America, Asia, and Africa. **Somatization** refers to *physical ailments resulting from stress or emotional distress*. One explanation may be that in many collectivistic societies, individuals are discouraged from voicing their psychological complaints in the company of friends or extended family members. Furthermore, depression is viewed as a minor, transient illness not requiring immediate family intervention. Consequently, an individual who experiences a depressive episode is often forced to use somatization to signal distress and thereby gain attention. As Draguns (1990a) states, in the case of depression, "somatization serves as a culturally sanctioned cry for help" (p. 311). Thus, the nature and treatment of depression, like many other illnesses, reflects the interaction among ecocultural systems, historical and sociocultural factors, and developmental niche.

Today, depression is often referred to as the “common cold” of psychological disorders, and Prozac (used to treat depression) is one of the most widely prescribed drugs in the world. It is customary to think of depression as a result of living and working in a highly industrialized and hurried society. However, as Draguns (1994) points out, “Depression is not the exclusive property of Judeo-Christian cultures” (p. 168). In fact, depression is probably experienced to some degree in most, if not all, of the world’s cultures. Even so, health care professionals have yet to agree on a set of depression symptoms that can be universally applied and it is unlikely that they ever will because of the role played by cultural variables. Draguns (1994) affirms this: “The cross-cultural study of depression has not yet progressed to the point of being able to pinpoint the worldwide invariant manifestations of depression” (p. 168).

### ***Schizophrenia***

During the last 200 years, schizophrenia has been one of the most frequently studied psychopathic disorders. **Schizophrenia** refers to *a group of severe psychological disorders characterized by disturbances in thought, perception, and affect or emotion*. In recent years, increasing attention has been given to the study of cultural variations in schizophrenia. For example, in 1973, the World Health Organization began conducting a series of studies in China, Taiwan, Colombia, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, India, Nigeria, the former Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The goal of these investigations has been to determine the extent of schizophrenia and the sociocultural and historical factors surrounding it. Findings have pointed to the identification of several core symptoms, including restricted affect, thinking aloud, lack of insight, poor rapport, incoherent speech, and widespread bizarre delusions (Draguns, 1994). In addition, three symptoms were identified that would not be considered symptoms of schizophrenia: waking early, depressed facial features, and expressions of extreme elation (Draguns, 1990b). Subsequent research conducted by WHO (1979) and Sartorius and colleagues (1986) reports a greater likelihood of these symptoms occurring in Colombia, India, and Nigeria than in the other industrialized countries mentioned earlier. One explanation may lie in the finding that schizophrenia is inversely proportionate to educational and occupational level. In fact, according to Draguns (1994), poorer and less educated patients in developing countries (e.g., India and Nigeria) recovered most quickly from this illness.

In the last ten years, WHO has continued to conduct cross-cultural research on more than 3000 schizophrenic patients in over twenty countries. Results indicate that schizophrenia occurs in nearly all cultures and that the prognosis is better in developing countries than it is in highly industrialized developed countries. Apparently, the support and encouragement provided by extended family members help reduce some of the symptoms associated with schizophrenia.

Schizophrenia has also been studied in India and Nigeria where the symptoms have been found to be similar to those reported by schizophrenics in Western countries and include hallucinations, delusions, and withdrawal. The separation of the schizophrenic from others and the disruption of the cohesive family system is the most mysterious aspect of this illness to the normal population. It is not the disease itself that is puzzling but rather the inclination toward withdrawal and obsessive self-focus. The nature of the disease threatens collectivist values and clashes with ecological orientation and developmental niche.

### **Acculturation and Adaptation**

The challenge of living, working, or studying in another culture is a common experience for an increasing number of today's young adults. It brings with it stresses that have both physical and psychological consequences for health. Perhaps more so than other life transitions, moving to a different culture changes a person's ecological systems at all levels. Changes in food and climate, language, financial issues, work/study problems, and loss of social network are among the concerns when one moves to a different culture. Therefore, it should not be a surprise that most "sojourners" experience their acculturation as stressful. Have you spent an extended period of time living in another country? What stresses did you experience? How did you adapt to your new surroundings?

Although all acculturation is stressful, we differ in how we perceive stress and how we cope with it. The difference in response to acculturative stress is a result of the dynamics of a person's ecological system earlier in life (e.g., such as parents' characteristics), as well as the dynamics of the ecological system into which the person enters. Kim and Won (1997) learned that Chinese students reported experiencing more daily stress in their adaptation to a new environment than did Korean and Japanese students in comparable situations. Similarly, among African and Western students studying at Chinese universities, African students reported more stress in their daily lives than Western students, particularly in areas like climate, finances, reading and writing in Chinese, social activities, and academic performance (Hashim and Zhiliang, 2003).

Cross (1995) focused her research not so much on the perception of acculturative stress but on adaptation strategies employed by East Asian and American graduate students at the University of Michigan (U.S.). Students in the study came from South Korea, the People's Republic of China, Japan, and North America. East Asian students placed more emphasis on community and interdependence than did American students. On the other hand, American students exercised strong self-reliance and independence. When adapting to new surroundings, Americans considered expressing oneself and being an autonomic thinker as important cognitive skills. Those East Asian students who showed more preference for independence also used more direct coping strategies when addressing problems related to daily stress.



More direct strategies were correlated with reduced level of stress, that is, students of both cultures who were willing to take direct action when confronted with problems of adaptation were less distressed and healthier.

Adult Taiwanese, adjusting to life in the United States, experienced similar adaptation patterns. Ying and Liese (1990) recruited individuals at a seminar designed to prepare them for their overseas study and followed them through their “abroad experience.” The researchers inquired about such areas as homesickness, physical complaints, levels of control, loneliness, social support, relationship problems, and perception of host country. The results indicated that those adults who took greater risks and became more actively involved during their studies were healthier and better adjusted. They experienced fewer physical difficulties than those who practiced traditional Chinese customs and declined involvement in day-to-day activities on campus. Good adjustment was also related to a sense of control; individuals felt more secure when they made decisions on their own, apart from family interference. Conversely, a decline in perceived control was associated with feelings of pressure to comply with family directives to strictly adhere to Chinese traditions. These and other findings lend support for the use of training programs as preparation for study or work-abroad experiences. If people can learn about the ecological system they are about to experience ahead of time, they may be able to adjust their coping strategies accordingly, making the transition from one culture to another a less stressful experience.

## ◆ LATER ADULTHOOD

When we think of aging, we frequently have mixed reactions. On the one hand, we think of a group of elderly people enjoying their “golden years” by visiting grandchildren, traveling, and perhaps volunteering. On the other hand, we sometimes perceive the elderly as frail, weak, dependent, and in need of extensive medical care. Certainly, among many North Americans and increasing numbers of older people in other cultures, this can be a disturbing and confusing time. The term **senescence** is used to describe *the process of biological change associated with normal aging*. While the rate of senescence varies individually, socially, and culturally, few people (if they live long enough) can escape the effects of the aging process.

A better understanding of lifespan development, along with advances in medical technology, has helped to expand the life expectancy of the world’s people, especially in industrialized nations. For example, in the United States, nearly 14 percent of the population is sixty-five or older. In addition, the first of 77 million “baby-boomers” (those born between 1946 and 1960) turned sixty in January of 2006; and by 2030, one in five Americans will be sixty-five or older, including as many as 380,000 people over the age of one hundred. The fact that they are among the largest,



healthiest, and best educated group of Americans ever to move through and beyond their fifties will present many challenges as well as opportunities to families, businesses, policymakers, and health care providers, and have significant impact on culture and values for many years to come.

### **Disease and Premature Aging**

Elderly persons experiencing the normal signs of aging often complain of reduced energy, vision and hearing loss, dried and wrinkled skin, brittle bones, slower reaction time, diminished motor skills, and sometimes a loss of memory. These complaints, some subtle and others less so, are common in most cultures and are often legitimate. But what about those who age before their time?

Following research conducted on a rare and cruel disease known as Werner's syndrome, scientists at the University of Washington put forth some ideas regarding the aging process. People suffering from this disorder experience all the signs of normal aging, but they do so beginning in their mid-twenties and usually die before they reach their fiftieth birthday. They gray prematurely and develop wrinkled skin, first on the face, then on their hands, legs, and feet. They catch frequent colds, which often lead to pneumonia, and develop cancer, kidney and heart trouble, and osteoporosis. In addition, they show some of the same symptoms seen in Alzheimer's patients (e.g., problems in concentration, remembering, and decision making). In April 1996, scientists released findings that could be a major breakthrough in explaining why we age. They identified the Werner's gene, the first gene known to cause human aging. Although optimistically cautious, scientists at the National Institute on Aging called this discovery remarkable. Werner's syndrome is estimated to affect 1 in 200,000 individuals in the U.S. but 1 in 20,000 to 40,000 in Japan. Scientists are not yet sure why this is the case.

With more accurate identification and treatment of illnesses, as well as rapid advancements in technology, many cultures are experiencing lower mortality rates and longer life expectancies. However, the longer people live, the greater the chance of encountering a major physical or psychological problem. Throughout the world, many elderly die each year from heart disease, cancer, or stroke, and arthritis, osteoporosis, and injuries resulting from falls and other accidents require extended hospitalization or nursing home and hospice care for elderly sufferers.

### **Cultural Views on Dementia and Alzheimer's Disease**

What is the relationship between age and psychological decline? How do a culture's ecocultural system and an individual's developmental niche contribute to the aging process? As the average lifespan has expanded, we have seen dramatic increases in cases of **dementia** and Alzheimer's disease. In the

United States persons diagnosed with Alzheimer's represent about 10 percent of the population over the age of sixty-five and as much as 50 percent of those eighty-five and older.

In the early stages, Alzheimer's disease resembles normal aging, with periodic memory loss, frequent agitation, problems speaking, and difficulty concentrating for long periods of time. However, as the disease worsens, the signs become more apparent. In the later stages, individuals forget how to perform the most basic tasks, such as changing clothes, eating, and going to the bathroom. They become completely dependent, require twenty-four-hour supervision, and are unable to recognize family members and medical personnel.

While older age and genetic predisposition may be two of the greatest risk factors in developing the illness, cultural influences may play a role that is not yet fully understood. An interesting study by Yamada and colleagues (2002) suggests that diet and eating habits may be an additional risk factor. These researchers found a notably higher frequency and severity of symptoms in their Japanese-Brazilian Alzheimer patients than in comparable samples of Japanese patients. An analysis of patients' dietary patterns revealed that the Japanese-Brazilian diet includes little fish and large amounts of meat—the opposite of the typical Japanese diet. While one study does not establish dietary patterns as a single risk factor, it certainly points to the desirability of considering ecocultural factors along with biological ones.

How do caregivers in different cultures respond to an elderly person suffering from Alzheimer's or similar diseases of aging? How do cultural beliefs about family values and relationships influence the course of these diseases?

Regardless of where it strikes, the devastating effects of Alzheimer's disease affect many people. For example, caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's can be very stressful. This is evident in Strong's (1984) study of caregiver support for Alzheimer's disease patients, in which she compared American Indian and Caucasian caregivers and found that both groups felt equally frustrated, angry, guilty, anxious, and helpless. The gradual deterioration of the patient left caregivers in both groups searching for answers. American Indian caregivers were much more communal and interdependent and employed more supportive, although passive, strategies in coping with the stress. For instance, common comments were "We just have to get used to this. There's nothing you can do about it but try and make them comfortable." Caucasian caregivers, on the other hand, initially tried to handle the situation by themselves, rarely turning to others for help and support.

The difference in the way the two groups responded to the stress of caregiving reflects their culture's ecocultural system and their own developmental niche. Strong (1984) reports the perspective of an American Indian caregiver: "The white man . . . is torn between two ideals; on the one hand he believes in freedom, in minding his own business, and in the right of people to make up their own minds; but on the other hand, he believes that he

should be his brother's keeper" (p. 29). In Indian society, taking care of family members is the chief responsibility of each person, and nobody is exempt.

In another study, Cox (1993) conducted personal interviews with eighty-six Hispanic caregivers in New York to examine the ways in which cultural values and norms influence behavior. Her findings concur with those of Strong's, suggesting that family cohesiveness plays a significant role in caregivers' behavior. As with American Indian caregivers, Hispanics appeared to accept passively the stresses of caregiving and believe it is part of their heritage to take care of the afflicted member. At no point did caregivers in either study consider admitting their relative to a nursing home or hospice. Have you encountered this problem within your own family? How have members of your family dealt with it? If not, how do you think you will deal with it, particularly with regard to an aging parent or other loved one?

In 1991, Meng conducted a survey in China and reported that 96 percent of elderly persons reside with family members and are cared for until they die. Strong family interdependence and cohesiveness were shown to have a positive impact on the physical and mental health of weak and frail elderly parents living at home. At no point in caring for their aging parents did caregivers consider the possibility of sending them to a medical facility or nursing home. To do so would have brought immediate disapproval and shame from the community. These findings are consistent with those obtained by Frazier and Glascock (1994) in their work with the frail elderly living in a kibbutz community in Israel. Kalu and Kalu (1993) found that frail elderly parents in Nigeria responded somewhat differently. Those who were plagued by physical and mental infirmities retrieved their umbilical cords, buried at birth in their native village. This act is believed to help slow down the aging process. The event is a festive, colorful celebration attended by family members and friends, who surround their loved one with love and support.

As we learn more about the genetic and environmental foundations of Alzheimer's and other diseases common among the elderly, along with methods of treatment from different parts of the world, we can anticipate that cures will be found in the future. These were among the goals discussed at the first Alzheimer's Association International Conference on the Prevention of Dementia held in Washington, D.C., in June 2005. In the meantime, efforts to discover why a person's brain at some point in the lifespan begins to self-destruct continue.

### **Coping with Chronic Illness in Older Age**

Faced with the prospect of failing health and developing chronic illness in older age, coping becomes more critical for survival and maintenance of one's quality of life in later years. Geriatric researchers Becker and Newsom (2005) provide a good example of how the specific historical, cultural, and social context of African Americans in the United States has shaped their responses

to, and coping with, chronic illness later in life. In particular, this segment of the population has developed coping strategies that emphasize reliance on self, community, and spirituality rather than reliance on health services. Johnson, Elbert-Avila, and Tulskey (2005) add that these coping strategies develop in response to ecological systems in which older African Americans often experience economic disadvantages and a lack of access to health services. As a result, they seek out the resources available to them such as the support of family, community, and spiritual leaders. Similarly, Polyakova and Pacquaio (2006) describe how older immigrants from the former Soviet Union bring their cultural values and beliefs about illness and coping to their new cultural environment, building a unique developmental niche. Older immigrants cope with chronic illness by using distractions and by keeping active with hobbies. They also describe family support as important, especially the assurance by family members that the person's illness is just part of life and he or she can deal with the problem successfully.

### **The “Good” Death**

There are only two events in life that are truly universally shared by all humans: birth and death. Here we will discuss death and dying. Concepts of death and dying depend on cultural norms and beliefs. Here, we give particular attention to the notion of the “good” death, which refers to an ideal and desirable end-of-life scenario. Van der Geest (2004) suggests that the similarities across cultures in the idea of what constitutes a “good” death and a “bad” death far outnumber the differences. His study of people's experiences with death in a small rural town in Ghana seems to correspond to accounts from many other societies. In particular, a good death is characterized by dying after a long and well-spent life, after having resolved arguments and conflicts, in the company of loved ones, without pain, and while at peace with one's own death (p. 909). In contrast, Walter (2003) argues that cultural norms about the “good” death vary greatly, depending on the depth and content of beliefs, individualistic or collectivistic orientations, and the time it takes to die.

Historical and even contemporary examples describe martyrdom as “good” death. Death is accepted or even sought after, as a means to serve a “higher” cause, in exchange for rewards in the afterlife. On the other hand, between 40 percent and 75 percent of Europeans now believe that the present life is the only one. Would your view of death differ depending on whether your religious beliefs emphasize life after death or rebirth as compared to no after-life?

In individualistic societies, individuals emphasize the personal choice of how they should live and die, including the choice of euthanasia. In this context, a “bad” death is one in which the person is unable to make decisions and express her wishes. In collectivistic societies, the good death will take

into consideration the effect on the family and the continued influence of the dead on the lives of the living.

In past centuries, people were expected to die within a few days of becoming sick with a terminal illness. In the twenty-first century, many people (predominantly in developed countries) may be diagnosed with a terminal illness and live for many years. Can you picture how each scenario will lead to a different preparation for and anticipation of death? What would be a “good” or “bad” death for you or a close member of your family?

## ◆ SUMMARY

When we think about health and related issues, we usually don’t consider the many ways these may be affected by culture. How do cultural beliefs influence one’s well-being and ill health? This chapter explores cultural differences in health care and beliefs that influence development across the lifespan. We begin with an overview of how standardized tests and diagnostic techniques often are incapable of detecting medical problems in cultures other than those for which they are originally designed. We discuss the expression of illness symptoms and how they may be interpreted differently across cultures. Furthermore, the way individuals respond to illness and cope with it is also largely influenced by the cultural and ecological system.

Health problems, at birth and shortly afterward (e.g., preterm and low-birth-weight infants), can cause considerable concern for parents in many cultures. Variations in parental cultural beliefs, play a major role in the way cultures care for problem-birth infants.

Health issues during adolescence focus on the adolescent’s search for the perfect body and physical appearance. Cultural variations in the occurrence and treatment of eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia are examined in depth. Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including AIDS, also are discussed.

In early adulthood, pressures to achieve and to form interpersonal relationships with one’s peers are frequently accompanied by the stress of adaptation and acculturation; these stressors produce a variety of medical problems. The ability to maintain a healthy lifestyle grows increasingly difficult for families that migrate to different countries. Similar difficulties exist for students who pursue formal education in other countries. Several cross-cultural studies involving the resettlement of young adults are examined.

Middle adulthood is sometimes referred to as the “sandwich generation,” during which parents attempt to balance their own needs with the physical and emotional needs of their aging parents and growing children. This period can present unique challenges and produce medical problems, including depression and schizophrenia. Cross-cultural research indicates

that each culture approaches and treats these illnesses differently, depending on the ecocultural system and developmental niche.

The last stage in the lifespan, later adulthood, is often viewed as the “golden years,” with opportunities for retirement and travel. However, this stage is also characterized by health problems. In the closing section, a cross-cultural comparison of the status of the elderly is addressed, along with cultural practices for nurturing those afflicted with dementia and Alzheimer’s disease. In the end, older adults often create an ecological system for themselves that supports them in their adjustment to the old age health challenges.

### ◆ STUDY QUESTIONS

- Provide examples of how cultural beliefs and traditions affect the delivery of health care in Western and non-Western cultures.
- Define culture-bound syndrome, and explain the reciprocal process that exists between cultural beliefs and the methods used to diagnose and treat physical and psychological disorders.
- Distinguish between emic and etic aspects of health and culture, and discuss how each culture’s delicate balance of ecological systems and developmental niche need to be considered when diagnosing and treating illness.
- Discuss research devoted to the relationship between culture and sudden infant death syndrome, childhood mental health, eating disorders, STDs and adolescent drug use, depression, schizophrenia, and dementia.

### ◆ FURTHER READINGS

- S. Kazarian & D. Evans (Eds.). (2001). *Handbook of Cultural Health Psychology*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.  
This collection provides a state-of-the-art understanding of what is known and not known about the rapidly emerging field of cultural health psychology. The editors take a multicultural approach providing a diversity of perspectives by acknowledged experts in a wide range of crucial topics. Case studies are well designed and helpful in highlighting the major concepts within a chapter.
- David B. Morris. (1998). *Illness and Culture in the Postmodern Age*. Berkeley: University of California Press.  
In a narrative account, the author follows the concept of health and illness through modern history into the late twentieth century, providing a context for talk about health and illness, medicine and suffering. Anyone who wants to understand why people get sick differently in different cultures and what’s making us sick here and now will enjoy this book.
- Renee Rose Shield & Stanley M. Aronson. (2003). *Aging in Today’s World: Conversations Between an Anthropologist and a Physician*. New York: Berghahn Books.

In a unique approach, each author explores a different aspect of aging in alternating chapters, in turn followed by a commentary by the other. The authors interrupt each other within chapters to raise questions, contradict, ask for clarification, and explore related ideas—emphasizing the dynamic nature of their ideas about age. Finally, a third “voice,” that of a random old man, periodically “speaks” to remind the authors of their limited understanding of the subject.

Ronald C. Simons & Charles C. Hughes (Eds.). (1985). *The Culture-Bound Syndrome: Folk Illnesses of Psychiatric and Anthropological Interest*. Dordrecht, Netherlands: D. Reidel Publishing Company.

One of the best available compilations on culture-bound syndromes from many areas around the globe.

E. M. Suh & S. Oishi. (2002). Subjective well-being across cultures. In *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture* (Unit 7, Chapter 1), (<http://orpc.iaccp.org>) International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology.

This online chapter suggests that all individuals strive to be happy. How they pursue this ultimate human goal, however, seems to vary in interesting ways across cultures. Three key findings have emerged from recent scientific research: (1) Individualist cultures are happier than collectivists, (2) psychological attributes characterizing the self (e.g., self-esteem, self-consistency) are more relevant to the happiness of Western individualists than to the happiness of collectivists, and (3) the self-judgment of happiness is anchored on different types of cues and experiences across cultures.

## ◆ DEVELOPMENTAL ANALYSIS

### CULTURE AND HEALTH

My name is Matilda Skelton, but everyone—thankfully—calls me “Maddi.” I was born on September 17, 1938, in Elfville, Pennsylvania, a small farming community settled by Irish immigrants (population 1734). My parents and older relatives have often told me that I was a very healthy baby. As I looked at pictures of my younger days, I came to wonder whether “healthy” was another way of saying “plump.” I weighed nearly nine pounds at birth, which was quite rare for that era. From the time I was just two months old, I slept in a crib alone in my own bedroom. My parents often teased that they thought I would become an opera singer one day so I could put the strong set of lungs I developed (through countless hours of crying) to good use! Some of the more difficult cries to comfort a baby though are those related to teething. While my siblings and I were teething, my mother’s favorite remedy was to put a little brandy on her finger and let us suck on it. The brandy tasted good and helped to numb the feeling of pain in our gums. Not exactly modern medicine, but it

(continued)



seemed to work!

As a child, I remained active by playing outdoors and doing chores on the farm. I was a little larger than the other children my age but always felt accepted by my peers and family. Through regular exercise, and an eventual growth spurt at age fourteen, I grew into a well-proportioned adolescent. During adolescence, I learned about intoxicants. My parents received a letter from my health teacher, explaining that we were learning about the dangers of drugs at school. The teacher suggested that these messages be reinforced at home. Although the legal drinking age was only eighteen years at the time, underage drinking was a problem parents and teenagers had to address. When my parents discussed the dangers of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, they spoke about the legal ramifications as well as the physical consequences. I learned that my ability to think, breathe, exercise, and even have children could be compromised by the effects of intoxicants. Fortunately, my peer group was strong, and we encouraged one another to stay clear of drugs. (My mother assured me that the brandy I consumed at age one was not detrimental to my health!) As a parent, I was impressed with the public movement to educate children on the dangers of drugs. When my son, Alexander, was fifteen years old, he participated in a school program focused on keeping children's bodies free of drugs. The group hosted alcohol-free parties and dances. He and his friends remained very involved in the program through graduation. These types of programs provide adolescents with useful information, education, and a solid sense of peer support.

Both of our children are grown up now and have young children of their own. It has been delightful to watch our children grow as adults and into the roles of parents. Giorgio and I have also watched our own parents age and pass on. Both of Giorgio's parents passed away about ten years ago of heart disease and cancer, and my father passed away peacefully of old age two years later. My mother is still living and has begun to show early signs of Alzheimer's disease. As a result, we decided to move her to an assisted living facility last year so that she could receive more attentive care. The facility is a wonderful way for my mom to maintain her sense of independence, while also receiving excellent care by health professionals. She is active enough to participate in group activities and receives frequent visits from friends and family.

Giorgio and I have retired and fill our time with travel, visits with family, excursions with friends, and caring for those we love. We feel fortunate to be in good health and spirits. We try to keep our minds and bodies sharp by remaining active in the community and continually gaining new experiences. Last year, we began learning Tae Kwon Do and have earned our yellow belts! Our grandson is catching up to us by attempting to get *his* orange belt!

It has been fun documenting my life in this way and to observe the various cultural influences on my development. I also enjoyed exploring the changing cultural influences my husband Giorgio and I have had on the lives of our own children. Perhaps they, like you, will document their lives and cultural journey as well. I wish you all the best—*buona fortuna!*



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